Study Unit

The Elements and Principles of Design

Preview

Have you ever watched in fascination as an experienced artist painted a picture? Did you wonder how the artist knew which colors and values to choose, what forms to use, and how large or small to make those forms in relation to each other? Why does one artist end up with a good painting—a good design—while another doesn't?

Through study and experience, an artist develops his or her abilities to handle the various elements of design—line, form, color, texture, pattern, light, and space. The artist learns how to handle these elements while applying the principles of design—balance, proportion, scale, emphasis, and unity.

An interior decorator must learn how to use these same elements and principles of design. In this way, the decorator is also an artist—working on a room instead of on a canvas. Of course, most people already have some natural instincts for good design. Many people can appreciate good design when they see it, even though they aren't aware of the principles and elements involved. A professional decorator, however, does know the principles and elements, and he or she will use them as tools in creating the image that a room projects.

Because the art of decorating interiors is based on the elements and principles of design, this study unit is very important. Spend as much time with *The Elements and Principles of Design* as needed to fully understand all of the concepts discussed here.

When you complete this study unit, you'll be able to

- Recognize whether or not the elements and principles of design have been successfully applied to a decor
- Describe what interior decorators mean by the golden mean
- Explain the importance of function in laying out a room or space
- Explain the purpose of focal points in a decorated room
- Define and identify the elements of design, including line, form, color, value, texture, pattern, light, and space
- Define and identify the principles of design, including proportion, scale, emphasis, and unity

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The Elements and Principles of Design

THE ELEMENTS OF DESIGN

A home or an apartment is an artificial environment, created by humans and shaped by the society and economics of the age. Yet, throughout this discussion of the elements of design, you'll find nature mentioned again and again as a source of those elements. You might ask what nature has to do with interior design.

The elements of interior design—line, form, color and value, texture, pattern, light, and space—reach us through our senses of sight and touch. All of these elements exist in nature, and it's from our relationship with nature that we learn to analyze them. If you look closely at the shapes, textures, patterns, and colors in our artificial environments, you'll realize that we've surrounded ourselves with imitations of basic objects from the natural world. As a decorator, you'll learn how to create a decor that will satisfy a person's need to stay in touch with those elements based in nature.

Humans first became familiar with these elements in a distant and more primitive age, but we still find comfort in them. For instance, look at the setting in Figure 1. All of the shapes and patterns in this room correspond, in some way, to objects in the natural world. A human being may have designed the decor, but it was nature that acted as guide for the artistry. Elements and principles of design are what we human beings have learned from existing in nature.

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FIGURE 1—Your success as a decorator is determined by how well you can apply the elements of design to make a setting seem natural for people. This essence of the decorator's art means the difference between a house and a home.

Study the room in Figure 1 and see if you can see the influence of nature in the decor. Then, when you complete this study unit, come back to this photograph and see how much more you can find.

Let's examine each design element individually, beginning with the element of line.

Line

Line involves motion. Line leads the eye from one point to another. Whether it's through a landscape, around a room, or over an object, a line gives the eye a path to follow.

A line may be straight or curved. It may be horizontal, vertical, or diagonal. A horizontal line appears restful and stable because it appears at rest and in harmony with gravity. A vertical line, on the other hand, which seems to resist gravity, suggests strength and dignity. A diagonal line (neither vertical nor horizontal) seems to be restless and dynamic—neither up nor down, but rather on the move. A curved line has a soft, sensual quality.

Figure 2 shows some examples of line in nature. A horizontal line exists in the straight line of a horizon (view A). A soaring vertical line is evident in cliffs and tall trees (view B). A diagonal line is found in the slanted sides of mountains (view C). Finally, the sweep of a bay, the tops of sand dunes or low hills, and the shape of some clouds form curved lines (view D).

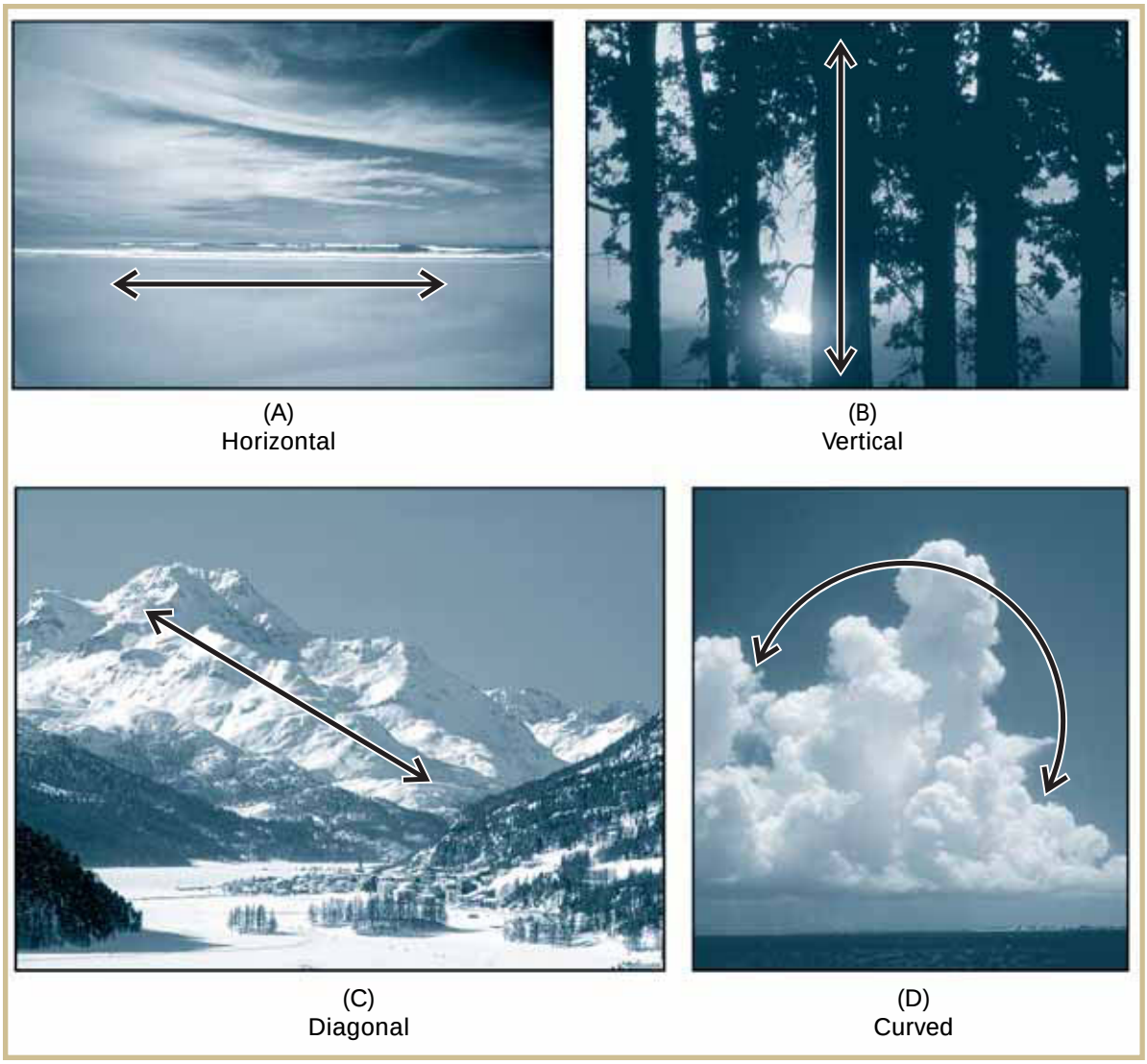


FIGURE 2—Line in Nature

Nature conditions us to be aware of lines. As an interior decorator, you can use this awareness when creating or changing moods in an interior decorating job. Figure 3 shows how the element of line can be incorporated into decorating. Used effectively, line can establish the mood of an entire room. Used without skill, line can also destroy the intended effect in a room. It can range from making a room look dull to making it look chaotic.

Horizontal Lines

Vertical Lines

Diagonal Line

Curved Line

FIGURE 3—Line in Interior Design

Too many horizontal lines may make a room monotonous. Too many vertical lines may make it too imposing. Your job as a decorator is to find a balance of lines that create a unified but interesting room. If most of the pieces in a room are low, the monotony should be broken by adding a taller piece. Too many tall pieces, on the other hand, can sometimes create too strong a feeling. To quiet down the room, break up the vertical feeling by adding some lower, horizontal pieces.

Form

Form is a series of lines enclosing a space. Thus, as a design element, form is closely related to line. The outlines of a form may appear straight, as in a cube, a box, and a pyramid. The outlines may also be curved, as in an apple and a ball. Other forms may have outlines that are a combination of straight and curved lines, as in a cone and a cylinder.

Forms are *harmonious* if they have either the same or similar lines. For example, the apples, pears, and grapes in Figure 4 all have curved lines. Even though their forms are somewhat different, they're in harmony—that is, they're related by the lines they have in common. The outlines of a box and a pear,

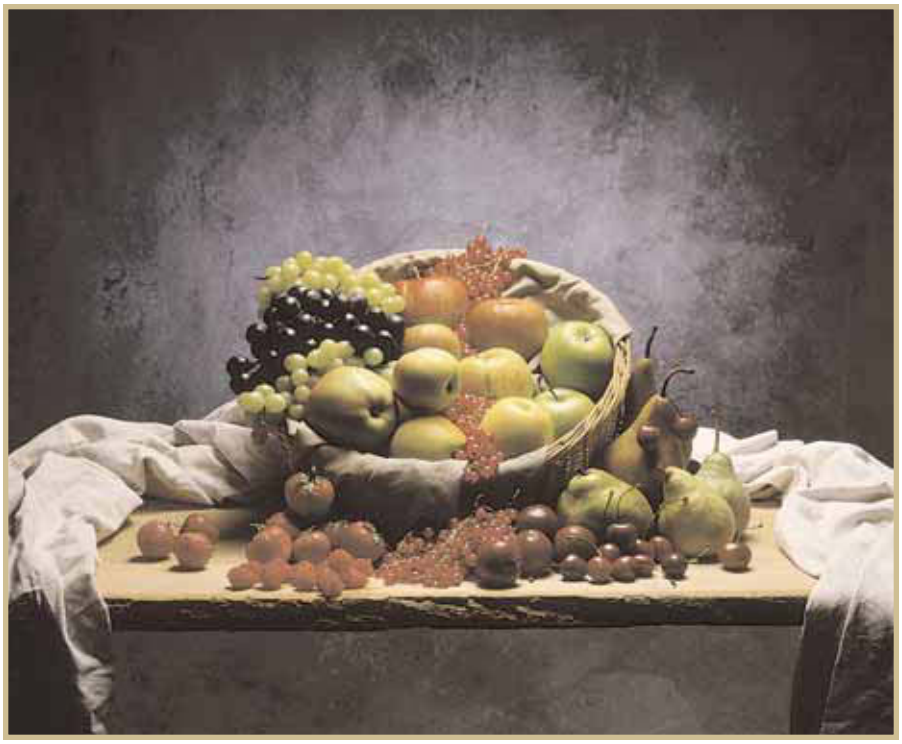


FIGURE 4—The forms of apples, pears, and grapes are harmonious.

on the other hand, are unrelated in form: the box is composed of straight lines and the pear of curved lines. The lines may not be similar, but you'll soon learn that it's possible to harmonize forms that are inconsistent in line. Such a skill will become very important to you as a decorator.

Figure 5 shows the geometry of several basic natural forms, along with some examples of these forms in nature. These same forms are commonly used in designing architecture and in decorating rooms.

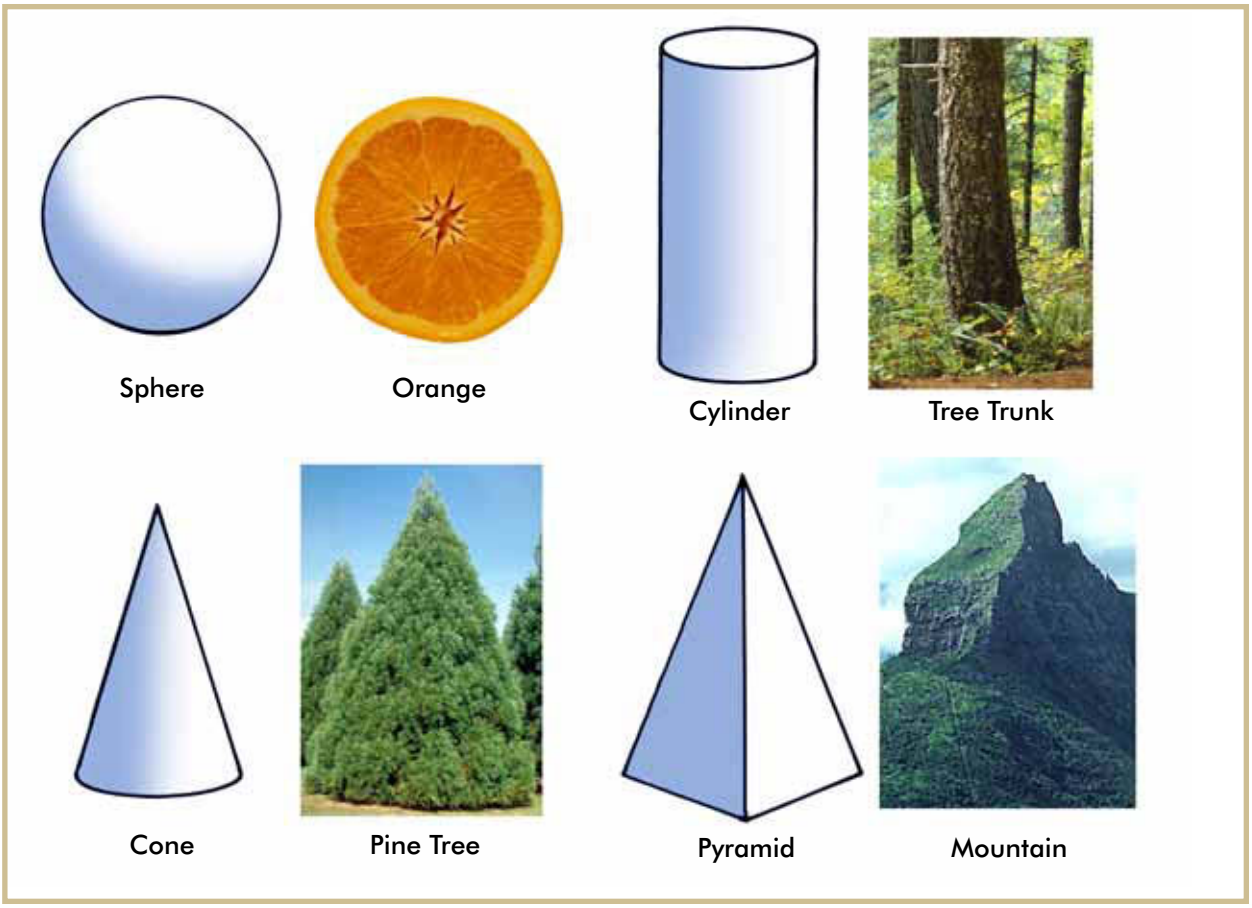


FIGURE 5—Forms in Nature

Figure 6 shows how basic, natural forms can be translated into interior decorating. In view A, the light represents a sphere. In view B, the table is in the shape of a cylinder. The lamp shade in view C is in the shape of a cone, with the tip cut off. Finally, the lamp shade in view D is similar to the shape of a pyramid. If you take a look around, you'll be able to spot these shapes in other areas of interior decorating: in tables, chairs, windows, and even rooms.

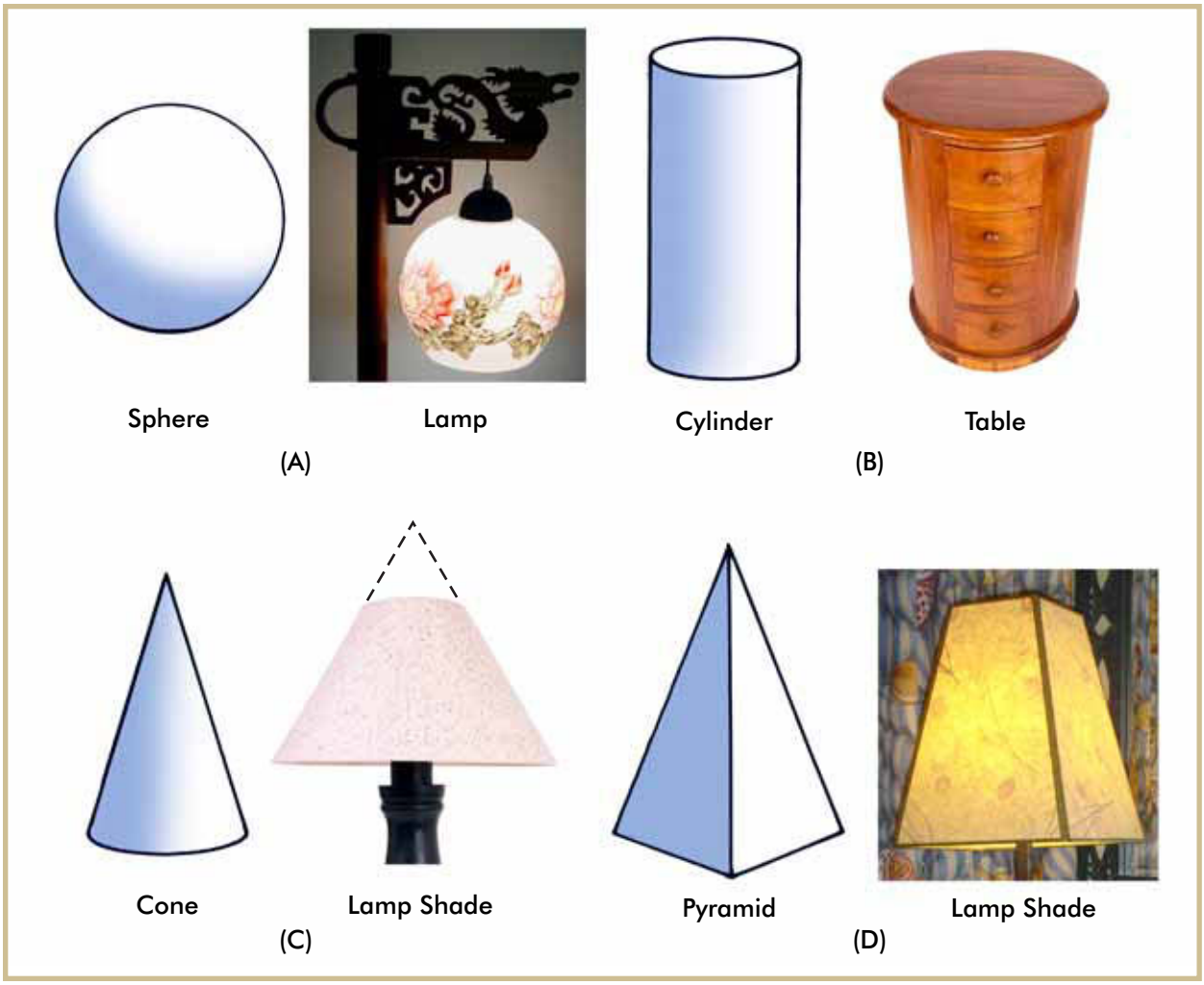


FIGURE 6—The items in these photographs represent different geometric forms—sphere (A), cylinder (B), cone (C), and pyramid (D).

Deliberately note the basic form of each object you see when you look at the interior of a room. For example, look at the furnishings in Figure 7. Try to look for the form of an object before you note its color and texture. After a while, when you've developed an eye for form, you'll find yourself being able to automatically choose forms that will be in harmony with each other while at the same time providing variety. You'll also learn to instinctively recognize the need to harmonize unrelated forms.

FIGURE 7—This living room illustrates some of the basic forms found in furniture. The tables and ottoman reflect a cylindrical shape, while the chair at right represents a box shape. (Photography courtesy of Drexel Heritage Furnishings)

Color and Value

Color is an element that has instant and universal appeal. Color is everywhere in nature—green trees, blue skies, gray rocks, blue-green oceans, red poppies, orange lilies, yellow dandelions, and purple violets.

Value is one of the properties of color. It refers to the amount of lightness or darkness in a color. Knowledge of value is important in developing or avoiding contrast. In nature, you may find an example of strong contrast. For example, consider a dark green spruce tree against a light blue sky. You may also find a natural example of little contrast, such as a white polar bear against a white snowbank—light against light (Figure 8).

FIGURE 8—In this photograph, the contrast between the polar bear and its surroundings is very subtle.

In interior decorating, you'll need to work with the color and value of floors, walls, ceilings, furniture, and accessories. You must consider the color and value of each part as it fits into the unified whole. In your search for good ways to handle color as a decorating element, study the color and value found in natural displays. For the art of decorating, there's no better teacher than nature.

Texture

Texture is the surface feeling or appearance of an object. Texture can appeal to the sense of touch, to the sense of sight, or to both. Texture can thus be sensed in many ways. A surface can appear rough or smooth, prickly or pebbly, shiny or dull, soft or hard (Figure 9). Look around at the objects near you. How do their textures differ? Touch them. Is one more pleasing to the touch than another?

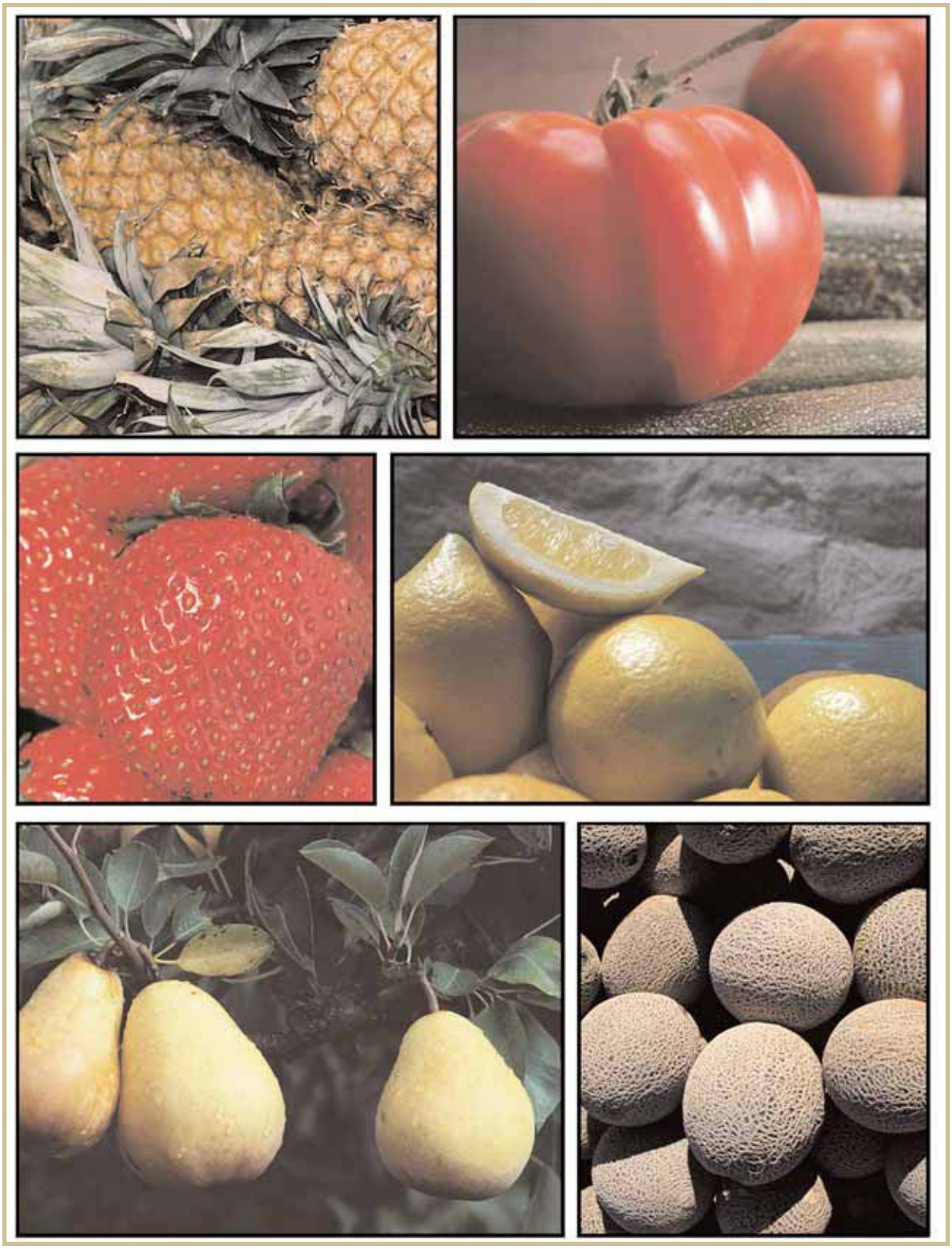


FIGURE 9—This assortment of fruit gives you an idea of the variety of different textures an interior decorator has to work with.

Memories of Texture

People respond to texture even more instinctively than they respond to color. Children can feel and appreciate textures before developing the ability to see clearly. Early in life, infants feel and learn to recognize a mother's touch, the nap of a favorite blanket, and the mesh sides of a crib. As children grow and experience more sensations, they become aware of still other textures—for instance, the soft fur of a cat or a tree's rough bark. A decorator can tap into these early memories of familiar textures by working similar textures into an interior design. For example, think of the textural difference between a soft velvet chair and a rough brick wall, and think of how these items could be used to create a feeling in a room.

Special Considerations for the Decorator

When you're considering the textures of the objects you're planning to include in a decorating scheme, you must consider balance, comfort, perceived textures, and practicality.

Balance. For any interior to be successful, it must have a deliberate balance of textures—just as nature has a balance of textures. For instance, think of a room with all slick textures: leather upholstery, glass and metal tables, metal-framed chairs, smooth wallpaper, and crystal accessories. Such a room may be exciting because of its shine, but perhaps the continual shine would become monotonous. This room needs some duller textures to create a balance. The contrasting textures that would provide such balance could be achieved by such additions as a plush rug in the conversation area or some handwoven, woolen throw pillows on the leather sofa.

Comfort. In striving for a balance of textures, you must consider the comfort of the textured objects. A very rough fabric might wear well and look good on a sofa, but its hard, rough texture may make the sofa too scratchy and uncomfortable for anyone sitting on it. On the other hand, a leather chair might look just right but feel uncomfortably hot and sticky in a warm climate. This same guideline applies to all your decorating work: Ensure that your client's physical needs are met

before you make your aesthetic decisions. Otherwise, instead of decorating a living environment, you may end up with a work of art that unfortunately seems intended to be roped off for viewing from a distance.

Perceived textures. The perceived texture of an object may be a visual illusion. A tweed pattern printed on smooth wallpaper may give the wall an illusion of having a tweedlike texture, even though the actual surface is smooth. As a decorator, consider all possibilities—whether they be real or mock textures—when decorating a room.

Practicality. As a decorator, you must also consider how the texture of an object affects the object's ease of maintenance. A very smooth and shiny surface shows fingerprints and marks if the surface is in a place where it will be constantly touched or scuffed. An object with a very rough or shaggy texture, such as a stiff-fibered woven rug, may gather a lot of dirt if placed in an area of heavy traffic, such as a hallway or the floor near an outside doorway. So, you must consider the practicality of each texture, as well as its appeal and appearance.

Pattern

Pattern, an element closely allied to texture, is the appearance of an organized design on a surface. As shown in Figure 10, nature has again provided the inspiration for much of the way that pattern is used in decorating. There's the overall spotted pattern of a jaguar or leopard, the symmetrical and more organized pattern on the wings of a butterfly, the interesting pattern in an orchid, and the honeycomb look of a giraffe. These and other natural patterns have surrounded and continue to surround us. They inspire us to develop similar patterns in our artificial surroundings.

FIGURE 10—Study the patterns in these photographs from nature. These and other similar patterns in nature have inspired interior decorators over the years.

Decorative patterns. Patterns may be woven into a fabric or printed on surfaces of various materials. Or the pattern may be formed by laying down tiles or wood strips in different designs. Learn to recognize all of the patterns in a room, no matter how large or small they may be. Even the lines formed by the edges of the slats on a miniblind create a definite pattern. A row of any identical items forms a pattern. The patterns that you choose in fabrics and decorative items will be most effective, however, if you select them to harmonize with the structural and other existing patterns already in the room.

Sizes of patterns. Consider the sizes of patterns in relation to the size of the room in which they're to be used. A small pattern in a large room, for example, won't have the impact that a large pattern will have in a smaller room. To achieve the desired effect, consider the size of the room or piece of furniture in relation to the size of the pattern and to the desired effect.

Multiple patterns. When more than one patterned print is used in a decorating project, select the dominant pattern first. Then coordinate the other prints with the dominant one. The secondary print should pick up a color from the primary one. Also, the secondary print shouldn't be as strong as the primary one.

Light

The element of *light* drastically affects the objects on which it falls. The amount and wavelength of light can change the appearance and color of the objects it touches. The color of a white house at noon on a sunny day is quite different from its color at sunset and by moonlight. Light is another element that you can use to mold a room's appearance and mood.

Space

Space is any enclosed area. For you as an interior decorator, space is the room or rooms in which you are to place furniture and accessories.

Space has three dimensions—length, width, and height. Don't limit your thinking to just any two of those three dimensions. When you look at a floor or elevation plan, don't think only of the length and width of the room and furniture. Imagine also the depth and height of each item. Figure 11 shows how two-dimensional drawings made from different angles can be used to develop a three-dimensional image.

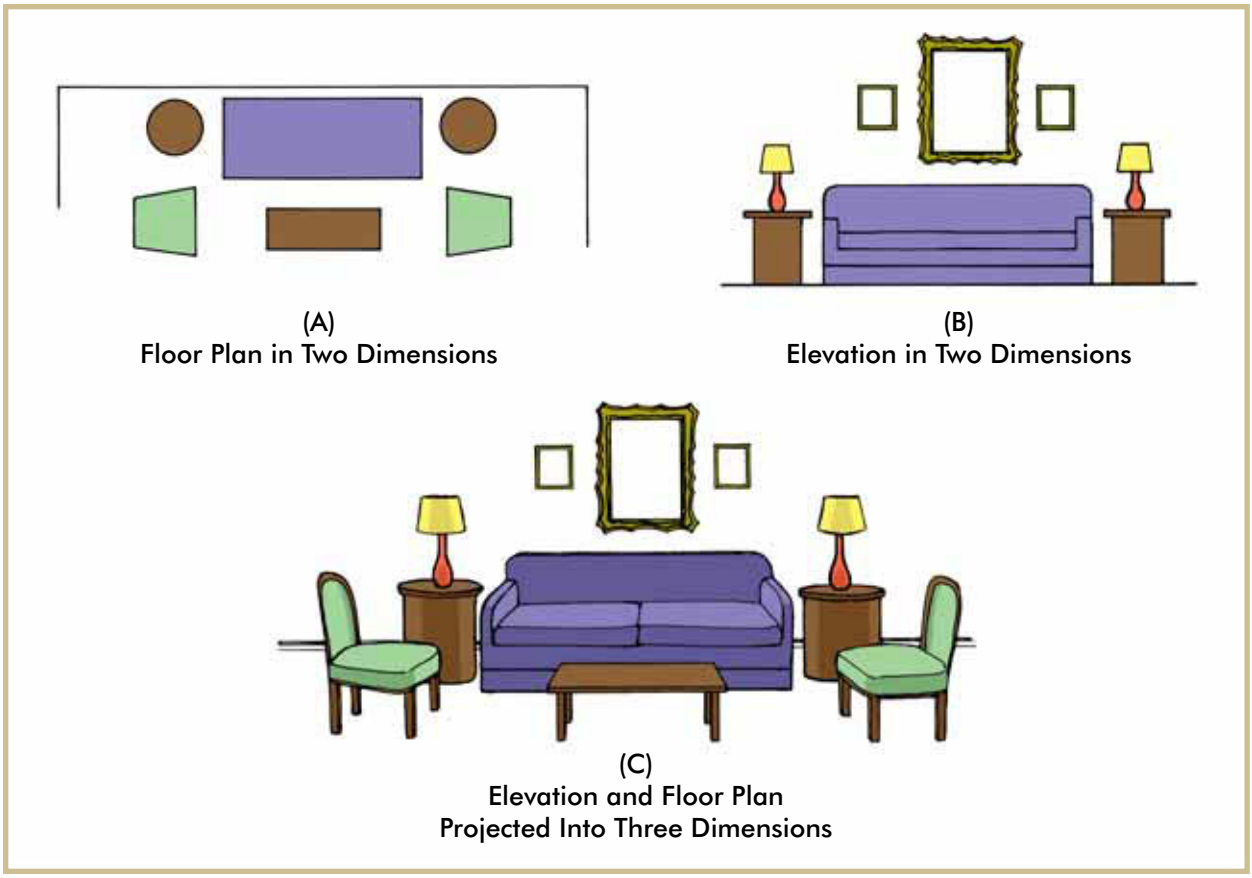


FIGURE 11—A two-dimensional floor plan (A) and a two-dimensional elevation (B) have been developed into a three-dimensional image (C).

When you're working on any decorating project, don't consider just the height and length of the objects as they appear against the wall, as in Figure 11B. Think also of how the objects will project into the space of the room, as in Figure 11A and C. Use these plans to inspect the room for unused, less-obvious areas of space. Imagine how such areas can be filled to create interest. For example, hanging lamps or plants or a decorative object with a long diagonal line may provide a satisfactory balance to the way the room's space is filled.

As a decorator, you'll find that developing this ability to see and think in three dimensions is priceless.

Practice Exercises

Note: Do not submit your answers to these exercises. They're for your benefit only.

Exercise 1

Too many horizontal lines make the decorating plan in Figure A unsatisfactory. In a sketch, suggest any additions or changes that might make an improvement. After you've made your sketch, turn to the end of this study unit to examine two possibilities.

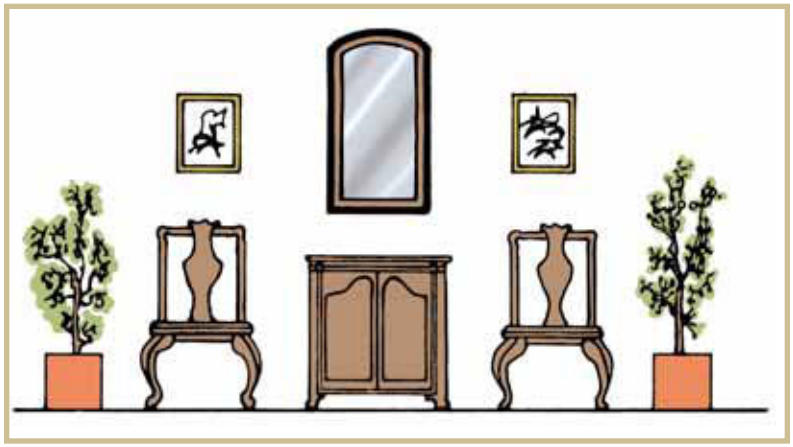


FIGURE A—Can you help to solve the decorating problem illustrated in this drawing?

Exercise 2

This exercise will help you develop your ability to read descriptions of rooms and see them vividly in your mind's eye. Imagine a large living room that has vibrant color distribution. Refer to the floor plan in Figure B to help you picture the placement of furniture in this living room. The floor is carpeted in a light beige tone with squares of indigo blue and rose throw rugs placed on top. The walls are a brilliant white. Two chairs are covered in an off-white fabric. The sofa is covered in the same fabric with navy blue piping trim. Throw pillows covered in the blue and rose of the rugs are placed on the sofa. A wooden table is placed at the end of the sofa. On the square table next to the sofa is a bright mauve coral sculpture. On the coffee table are a blue bowl and a bouquet of yellow, fuchsia, and orange flowers. An interesting collection of vases is grouped on the entertainment center. They

provide a focal point for the room. Most of the colors in this room are warm, advancing colors. To further increase the apparent size of the room, one wall is glass, allowing the brilliant blue of the water of the marina outside to come indoors.

Once you've carefully read the preceding description, turn to the end of this study unit for a photograph of this room.

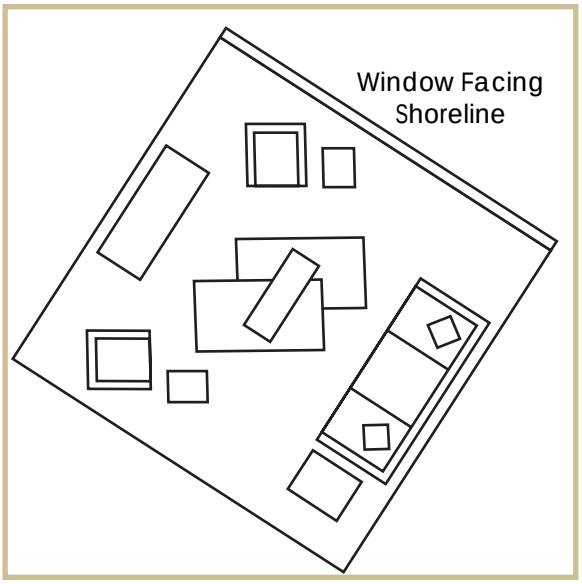


FIGURE B—Floor Plan of Room Description

Were you able to envision how the basic colors have been distributed throughout this room to achieve color balance? By now, the ability to see rooms in your mind's eye should be well developed. If it isn't, take some time to strengthen that skill. Look at a picture of a room. Write a description of it. Then read the description without looking at the picture. Close your eyes and try to see the room as you think of the descriptive words. Do this repeatedly until you can clearly envision the room.

Self-Check 1

At the end of each section of *The Elements and Principles of Design,* you'll be asked to pause and check your understanding of what you've just read by completing a "Self-Check" exercise. Answering these questions will help you review what you've studied so far. Please complete *Self-Check 1* now.

In the spaces provided, indicate whether each of the following statements is True or False.

_____ 1. In a well-designed room, all of the textures should be the same.

_____ 2. Although it can be horizontal or vertical, a line in decorating must be straight.

_____ 3. A secondary print should share at least one color with the primary print.

Check your answers with those on page 75.

THE PRINCIPLE OF BALANCE

In this section, you'll begin to examine the principles of interior design—balance, proportion, scale, emphasis, and unity. These principles aren't hard and fast rules to be followed unvaryingly in every decorating job. Rather, they're *guidelines* that will help you create satisfying living environments even while you're still developing your natural instincts for design.

As a decorator, you'll be asked to analyze problem rooms. Once you've studied the design principles and have practiced applying them, you'll be able to develop solutions for any problems that you discover.

Let's begin with the principle of balance.

Types of Balance

Good *balance* implies a state of equilibrium or poise, the "just right" place between extremes. In interior design, good balance requires properly distributing the visual weights of forms, colors, and textures throughout a room. No part of a room should seem annoyingly heavy or distractingly overemphasized. At the same time, no part should appear too empty and unimportant.

The three types of balance used in decorating a room are formal balance, informal balance, and radial balance.

Formal Balance

In *formal balance,* a centerline divides an area into two matching parts. One half is the mirror image of the other. The centerline is the *balance point,* or *pivot point*, for the arrangement. Formal balance is static and highly symmetrical. In fact, formal balance is sometimes called *symmetrical balance*. It's most frequently used in formal settings and with formal styles of furniture.

Arranging formal balance. Figure 12 shows some simple settings arranged according to formal balance. Note how the centerline divides each area into matching halves. As you can see, formal balance can be found in furniture arrangements as well as in arrangements on tables, chests, and fireplace mantels. It can be used with groupings of any objects, even flower arrangements.

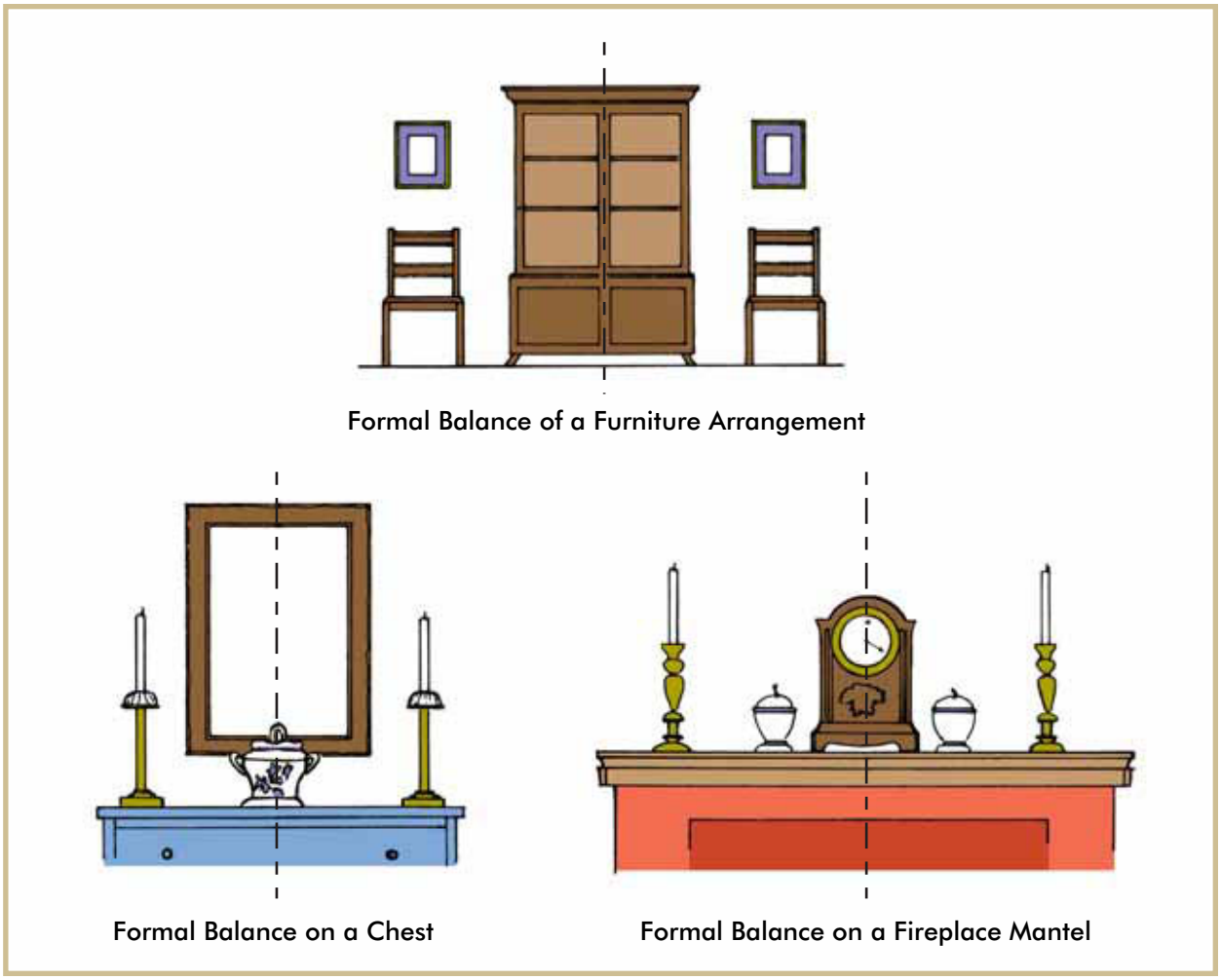


FIGURE 12—These three drawings illustrate formal balance of furniture and accessories.

Making minor variations. Small changes in pattern, style, and shape don't necessarily change the type of balance a setting has. Figure 13A shows a common example of formal balance. This arrangement features a sofa centered on a wall with identical tables and lamps on each side and a pair of matching chairs next to the tables. Over the sofa is centered

one large painting with a pair of smaller paintings on each side. The setting is well balanced, but it may not be as interesting or as exciting as your client would like. To add interest to such an arrangement, consider varying some of the parts of the composition, as shown in Figure 13B. For example, the lamp and the table on the right side were replaced by another lamp and table similar in size but different in shape and appearance. In addition, the chair at the left has been covered in a print. To balance out the new pattern on the chair, two of the pillows on the sofa have been covered in the same print as the chair. The balance in view B is still formal, but it's much more interesting and eye-catching than the original decor in view A.

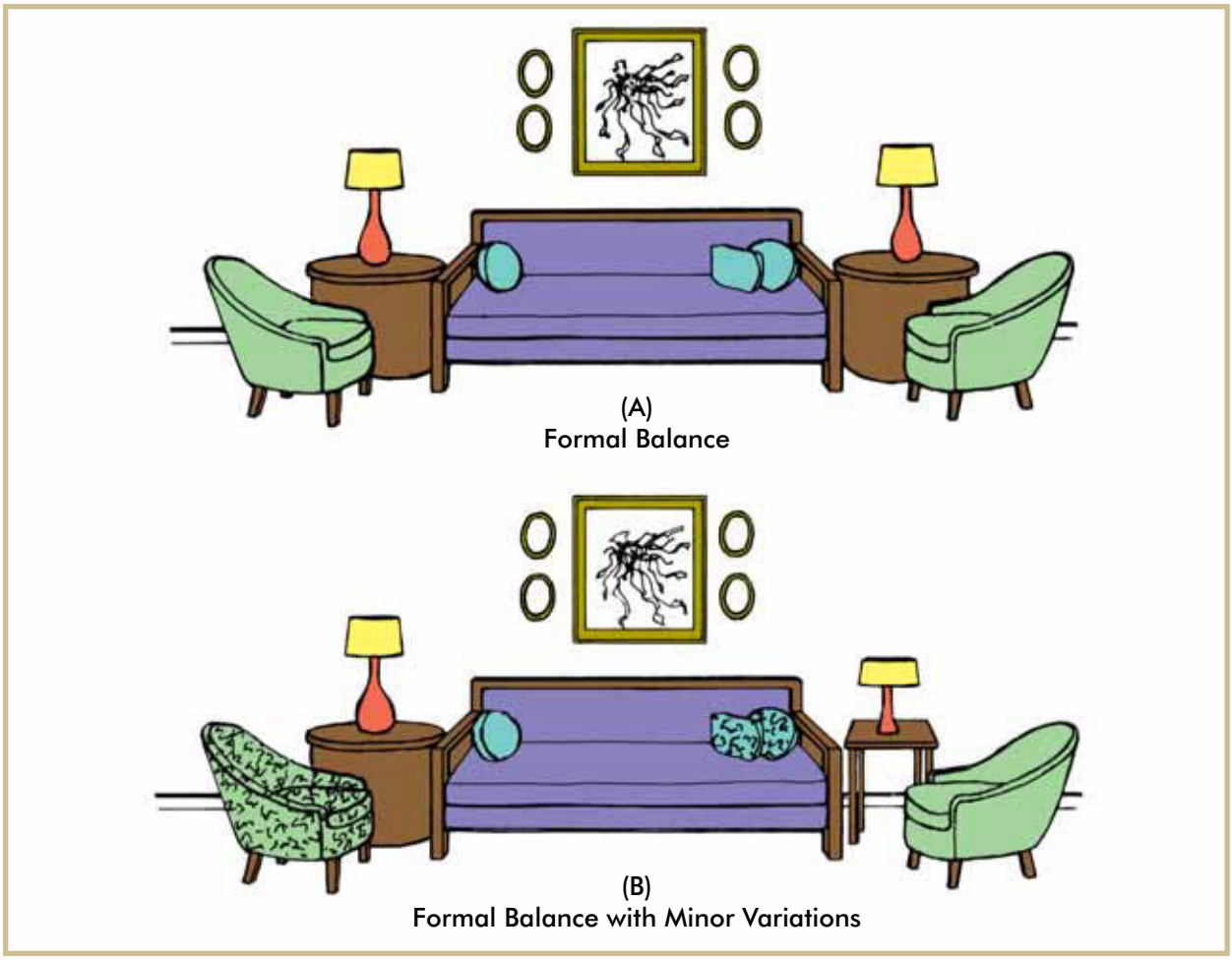


FIGURE 13—Minor variations like those in view B don't change formal balance. They simply add interest to the decor.

Figure 14 shows another example of formal balance with minor variations. Thoughtfully chosen accessories add interest to the setting. However, the pair of candlesticks on top of the credenza and the pair of similarly styled prints to the left and right of the piece help emphasize the formal balance.

FIGURE 14—While this credenza contains an assortment of different types of accessories, the setting is still formally balanced. (Photography courtesy of Drexel Heritage Furnishings)

Informal Balance

In formal balance, equal objects are placed at equal distances from a centerline. With *informal balance*, or *asymmetrical balance*, unequal objects are placed at unequal distances from a centerline. However, the objects are arranged so that the visual weight derived from the size and color of the objects is evenly distributed. The even distribution of the visual weight contributes to a feeling of balance on each side of the centerline. Figure 15 shows some examples of settings that have informal balance. Look carefully at the three drawings in that figure. In view A, the objects are obviously of unequal weight. However, since they're place at unequal distances from the centerline, balance is still maintained. In view B, the mirror and vase of flowers balance each other. Finally, in view C, the objects in the arrangement are quite different, but because of their arrangement, a sense of balance is achieved.

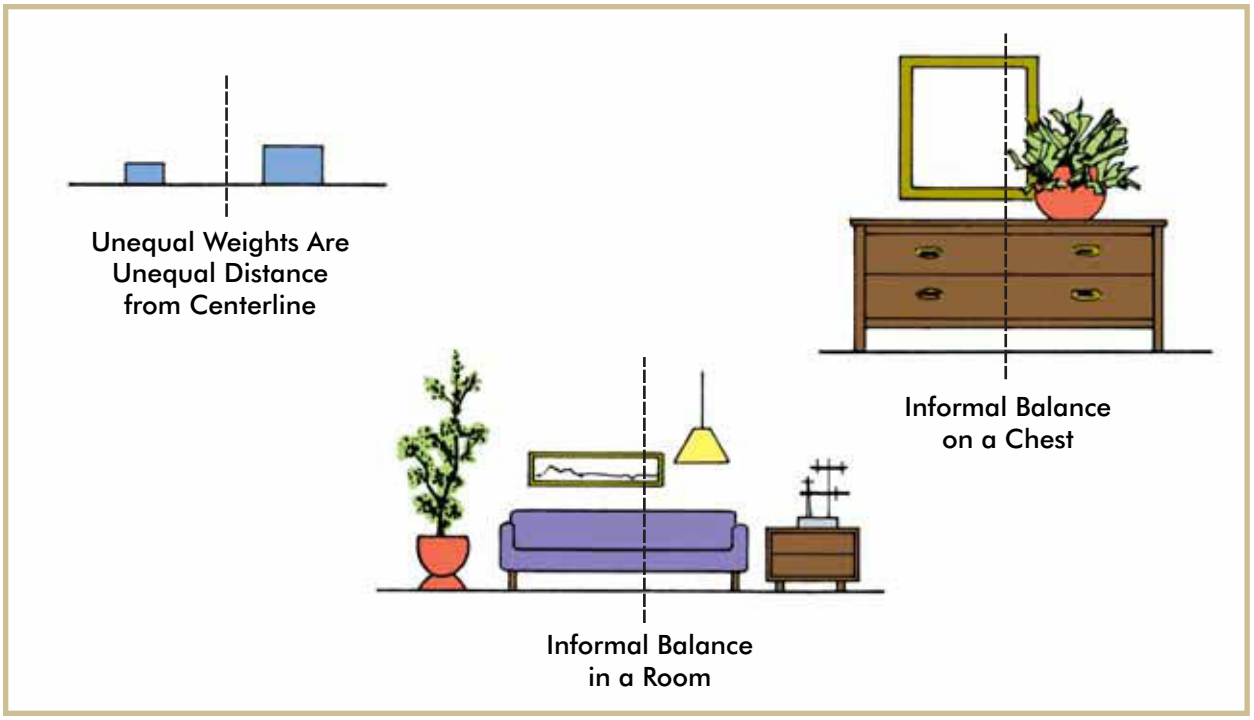
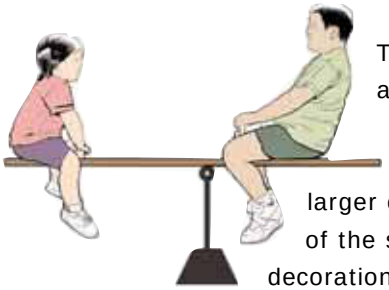


FIGURE 15—Each one of these arrangements illustrates informal balance.

Balance on a Seesaw



Think of informal balance in terms of a seesaw. Suppose two children of unequal weight decide to ride on a seesaw. To maintain balance, the larger child must sit closer to the center of the seesaw. The same is true in interior decoration. To establish or maintain informal balance, heavier objects (such as sofas) are usually placed close to the centerline, while lighter objects are moved farther from the centerline. Compared with formal balance, which is rather passive and static, informal balance is more active and has more movement.

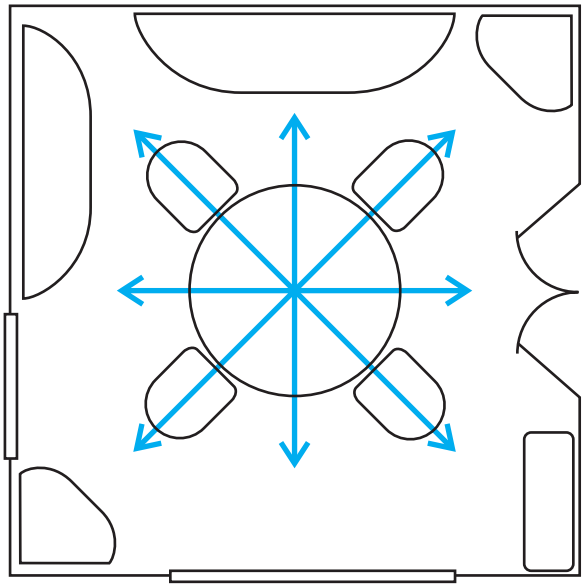
Radial Balance

Radial balance is a circular balance in which the objects are balanced around a central pivot point. This type of balance is frequently found in a dining room setting (Figure 16). The center of the dining table, which can be either square or round, forms the center of balance—that is, the hub around which the objects are arranged or balanced. A bowl of flowers may be centered on the table, place mats may be situated around the table's edge, and chairs would generally surround the table.

Often, informal balance is reflected in the arrangements of accessories, flowers, and tabletop decorations.

Although radial balance is used most frequently in a dining area, it's sometimes used in a large room to add variety to the furniture arrangements. Radial balance is also sometimes used on a patio, where chairs are grouped around a small, light, round table.

(A) An Example of Radial Balance



(B) Floor Plan of the Room

FIGURE 16—View A presents a photograph of a room with radial balance, and view B shows a floor plan of the same room. Notice how the center of this dining table forms the central pivot point of the room. All other objects are balanced around this point.

Designing for Balance

Different Types of Balance in One Setting

When you look at rooms or pictures of rooms, you may find that it's difficult to decide whether a particular room has a clear-cut formal or informal balance. That's because a skilled decorator who knows how to use the various types of balance frequently combines both types of balance in one room to create a more interesting setting. A room with groups that have only formal balance tends to be stiff and dull. Too many symmetrical pairs are uninteresting. Conversely, a room with all informal arrangements may lack a focal point. Such extremely informal balance may make the room a bit too casual for a client's tastes.

Sometimes a basic formal balance is deliberately modified, or broken, to add a note of subtlety and a slightly less formal feeling. For example, consider the informal plant in Figure 17. When added to a room that has too much formal balance, this ornamental plant may help to make the setting more interesting.

FIGURE 17—An asymmetrical plant can add informal balance in an overly formal decor.

The arrangement in Figure 18 shows another example of breaking up formal balance. Although the basic furniture arrangement has a formal quality, the table, love seat, and armoire at the far right are almost classically arranged. The meticulous display of objects on the coffee table also indicates a more formal aesthetic. The formality of the arrangement is underplayed by the muted brown tones and hardwood floors. The chair in the foreground breaks away from the precision of the formal setting and is softened by the throw over the left arm rest. Isn't this arrangement more interesting than it would be if everything in the room were placed at equal distances from the centerline?

FIGURE 18—The formal arrangement of the furniture is offset by the muted brown tones, hardwood floors, and chair in an unconventional position.

The dining room in Figure 19 is another instance in which both formal and informal elements are used. Note the formal way in which the picture is centered over the buffet table. Note also the formal arrangement of the two lamps on the buffet. On the dining table itself, however, the floral arrangement is somewhat out of center, which provides a more

FIGURE 19—This room contains formal balance softened by informal textures.

informal arrangement. In addition, the textural elements of the room provide a counterpoint to its formality. The flat, fire-engine-red wall, exposed crossbeams, rattan chairs, and country elements soften the formal arrangements.

The decoration of most rooms is a compromise of the extremes in the types of balance. A typical room has some formal and some informal balance, perhaps with one radial-balance group (if space allows). Figure 20 shows how the different types of balance can be used in close proximity to one another. A radial balance is used around the far table, but other types of balance are also visible in this room. For example, on the ottoman to the right, accessories are grouped informally, as if it were an end table. Meanwhile, the arrangement of objects on the table in the foreground displays formal balance. Combining the different types of balance in this way adds interest and variety to a room.

FIGURE 20—This room contains various types of balance.

Overall Balance

You must consider a room's *overall balance* as well as the balance of individual groupings. Balance should exist from side to side and from top to bottom. Figure 21 illustrates an example of a well-balanced room. However, in addition to a balanced layout of pieces on the floor, the pieces in a room should be agreeably distributed throughout the room's entire three-dimensional space.

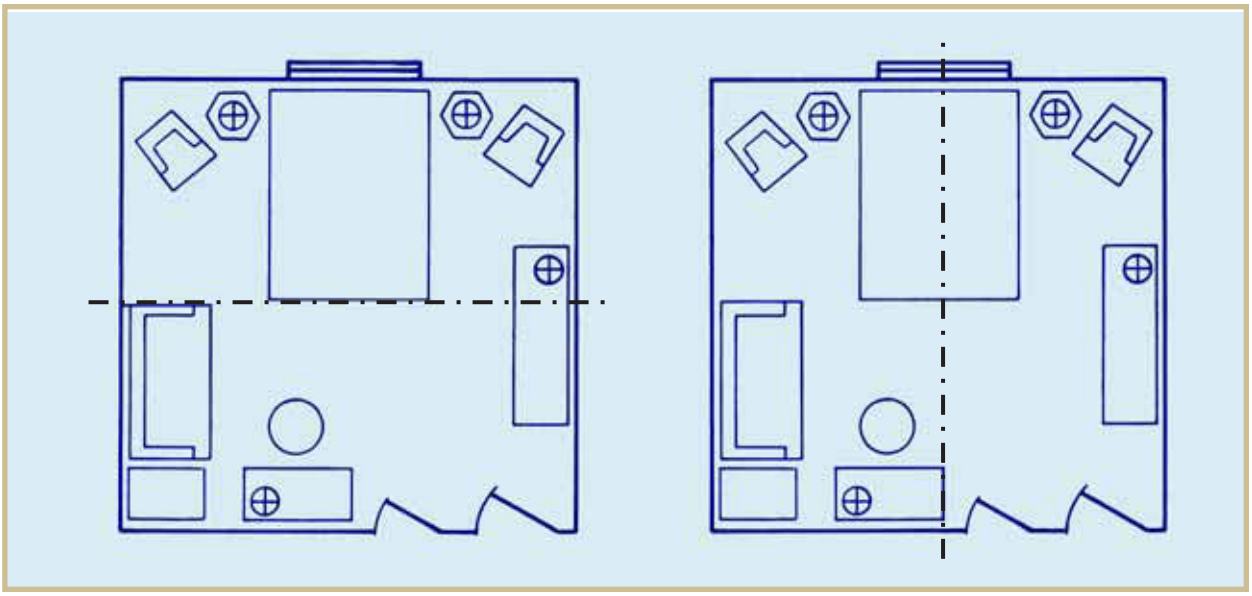


FIGURE 21—Consider the balance of a room's floor plan in both directions.

Balance of Texture and Color

You've just learned about balance in relation to objects and forms. When decorating a room, you must also consider balance of texture and balance of color.

Interior decorating involves a subtle interplay of the various kinds of balance to make a room's decor comfortable to the eye. You'll find that balance is one of the most important design principles that you'll apply. If a room is unbalanced, its occupants will be uneasy. The room may be tastefully decorated with coordinated colors, textures, and patterns, and even the furniture styles may work well together. Without balance, however, the room will still feel wrong.

Texture Balance

As well as balance of form, there must be a good distribution and balance of textures throughout a room. For an example of texture distribution, look at Figure 22. Notice how the smooth walls, coffee table, and vase contrast with the rough wood of the trunk and floor and the rough texture of the chair at the right. Can you see how the rough textures of some elements are balanced by the smooth textures of others? Although you should have a good distribution of a

FIGURE 22—The textures in this room are pleasantly balanced.

texture throughout a room, you also need a variety of textures. Think of how much less interesting the room would be if the smooth textures were without any contrast.

Contrast is important, but it shouldn't be allowed to upset the balance of a decor. Figure 23 shows an example of a setting that's balanced while still possessing enough contrast to provoke interest. This setting contains beautifully balanced contrasts of line and texture. The delicately patterned rug is tied in by the heavy textural interest of the stone and iron tables, yet an overall sense of lightness and delicacy is achieved by the clear glass tabletops and the soft pastel tones. Because they're tied in by good scale, the lighter images effectively contrast the heavier elements of the setting. The painting is unified to the fireplace by its shape and relative size. At the same time, the image in the painting provides a needed line contrast with its curves and diagonals. The well-proportioned accessories add excellent balance throughout the room.

FIGURE 23—Even with contrasts of line and texture, this setting remains unified and balanced. (Photography courtesy of Drexel Heritage Furnishings)

Color Balance

Just as textures must be distributed throughout a room, so must colors. Not only must the colors lead the eye throughout the room, they must also be balanced in visual weight. Darker and brighter colors seem to have more "weight" than lighter and duller colors. For a balanced distribution of color, use brighter and darker colors in smaller areas, and use lighter and less intense colors in larger areas.

In the next section, you'll begin to study the principles of proportion and scale. Before going on to that material, please complete *Self-Check 2*.

Self-Check 2

Fill in the blanks for each of the following statements.

1. To maintain the balance in an arrangement, place _____ (heavy, light) objects closer to the centerline.

2. The three types of balance that can be used when decorating a room are formal balance, informal balance, and _____ balance.

3. Compared to the other two types of balance, _____ balance is rather passive and static.

4. The phrase *asymmetrical balance* is another term for _____ balance.

5. To make certain that a room is balanced overall, you must consider the layout of the room in _____ dimensions.

Check your answers with those on page 75.

THE PRINCIPLES OF PROPORTION AND SCALE

Closely allied to the principle of balance are the two distinct principles of proportion and scale. *Proportion* is the relation of the size of one part of an object to the size of the other parts of the same object. For example, a rectangle may be twice as long as it is wide. The relation of the length of a rectangle to its width gives you a proportion for this two-dimensional shape. As shown in Figure 24, the proportions of a solid shape are based on the three dimensions of the shape.

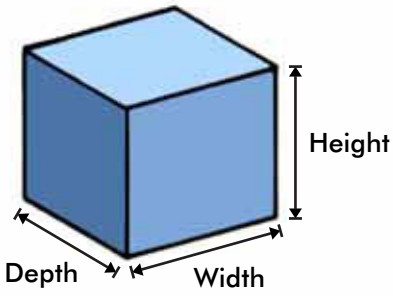


FIGURE 24—The three dimensions of a shape give you its proportions. The relation of the height to the depth is one proportion, the relation of the height to the width is a second proportion, and the relation of the depth to the width is a third proportion.

Like proportion, the scale of an object involves size. *Scale* is the relation of the size of an object to the size of one or more other objects or to the size of the space in which the object is enclosed. As shown in Figure 25, the scale of an object, such as a rectangle, can be changed without affecting its proportion.

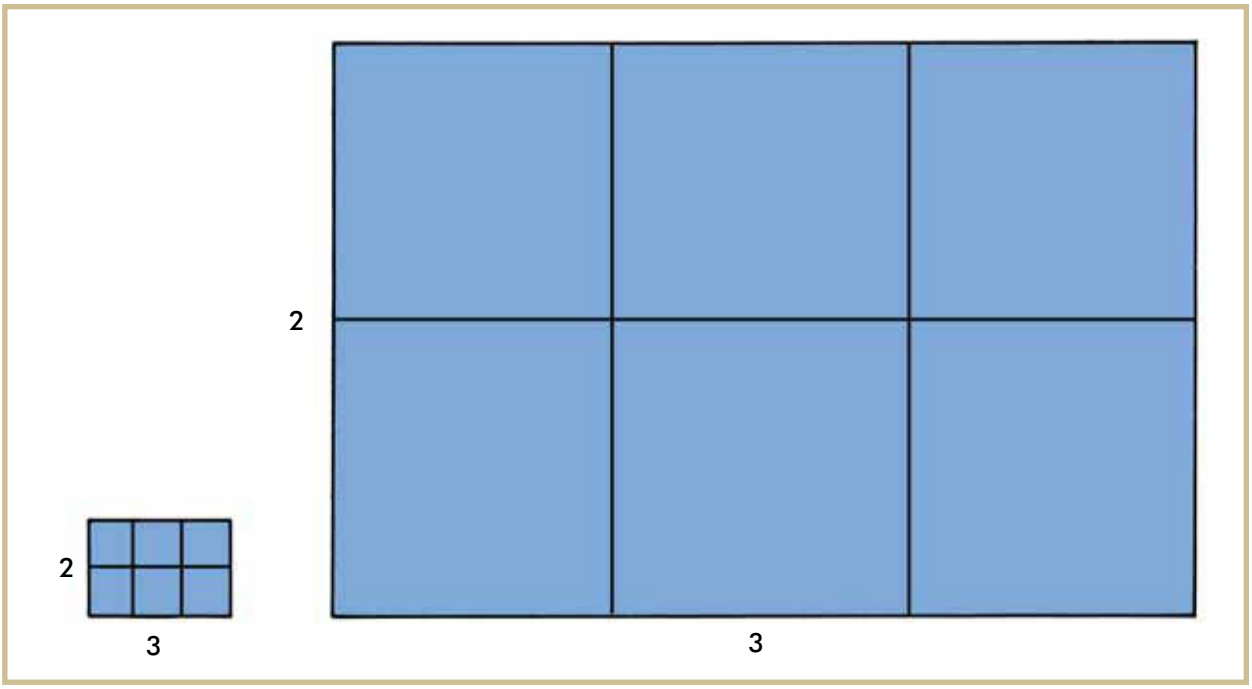


FIGURE 25—The two rectangles in this illustration are composed of six squares arranged in two rows of three squares each. Although the rectangles are different sizes, their proportions (2 to 3) are identical.

Now that you have a general idea of the difference between proportion and scale, let's examine each of these elements more closely.

Proportion

The Ideal Proportions

Throughout the ages, many theories have been advanced in an attempt to define ideal proportions. One of the most pervasive concepts to arise from these theories is the *golden mean*, or *golden ratio*. The Greeks, who developed this concept, considered any enclosure to be uninteresting if its proportions could be easily determined, or evenly divided—such as a rectangle

that's twice as long as it is wide. They considered a square, which is equal in both length and width, to possess the least pleasant proportions since its proportions could be immediately discerned. With this in mind, the Greeks sought to describe a rectangle with the best proportions.

They came up with a rectangle in which the sides can be expressed as a ratio of 0.618 to 1.0. Although decorators often use this ratio to plan rooms, they generally use a rougher estimate of 2 to 3. Therefore, according to this concept, a rectangle with sides in a ratio of two parts to three parts will interest people. Examples of this proportion are areas that measure 2 by 3, 3 by 4.5, 4 by 6, and 5 by 7.5. In other words, the length is approximately 1.5 times the width. Figure 26 shows several rectangles in which the ratio of the width to the length is 2 to 3. Although the size of these rectangles is different, the overall proportions are the same. These golden mean proportions can also be applied to solid objects: chairs, tables, and even entire rooms.

The Golden Mean in a Nutshell

The Golden Mean ratio of 2:3 can be expressed as the fraction 2/3. From your study of fractions, you should know that you can multiply the numerator and denominator of a fraction by the same number and still have the same fraction, or ratio. Therefore, the ratio 2:3, or 2/3, can be expressed in many different ways:

$$\frac{2}{3} = \frac{2 \times 2}{3 \times 2} = \frac{4}{6}$$

Multiplying the numerator and denominator by 2 results in the ratio 4:6.

$$\frac{2}{3} = \frac{2 \times 4}{3 \times 4} = \frac{8}{12}$$

Multiplying the numerator and denominator by 4 results in the ratio 8:12.

$$\frac{2}{3} = \frac{2 \times 8}{3 \times 8} = \frac{16}{24}$$

Multiplying the numerator and denominator by 8 results in a ratio 16:24.

You can multiply the numerator and denominator by any number. The resulting ratio represents the Golden Mean.

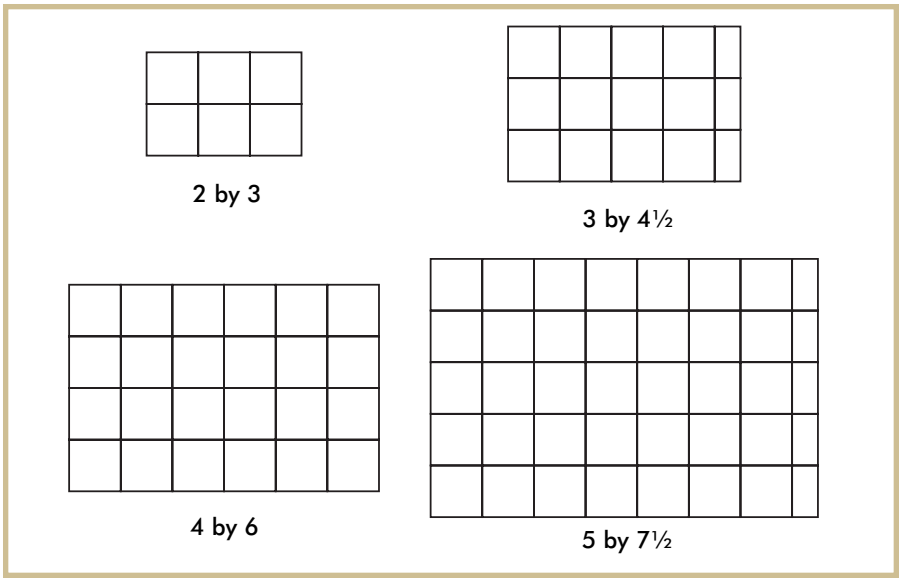


FIGURE 26—Although these rectangles have different sizes, they're similar in that their proportions are the same. The ratio of their widths to their lengths is 2 to 3.

By thinking in terms of the golden mean, you'll train your eye to detect interesting and pleasing proportions in rooms, furniture, and accessories. You'll soon discover, however, that other proportions are just as aesthetically pleasing and as interesting as those of the ancient Greek rectangles. The square, for example, may not have been an acceptable shape to the Greeks, but—as shown in Figure 27—it's popularly and successfully used today in various furnishings. The Parsons table, which is often made with a square top, has become a classic of modern design. Square forms are also evident in stacking cubes and other units used for building storage and divider walls.

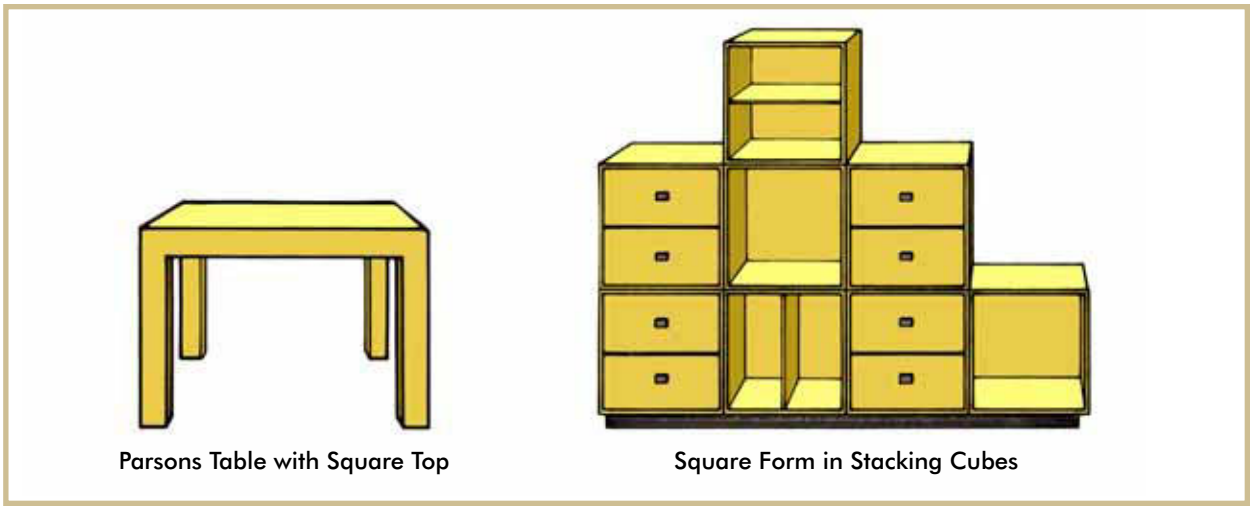
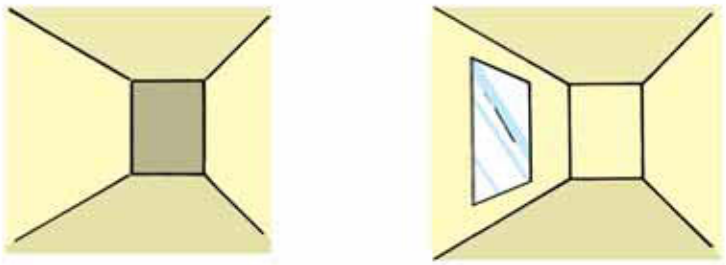


FIGURE 27—When you're selecting furnishings, consider the practicability of all proportions. In this illustration, the table has a square top, and the stacking cubes have square sides. Notice, however, that the cubes can be stacked to create different shapes. In this case, the main part of the arrangement is 2 cubes by 3 cubes, with an extra cube added at the top and the side for interest.

Although so far in our discussion we've focused mainly on only two dimensions—length and width—always bear in mind that proportions involve all three dimensions of an object: length, width, and height. When you examine an object—a table, a chair, or a room—consider all three of its proportions. For example, let's consider a room. Is its length too great for its width? Is its ceiling too high for its width and length? Or do the proportions seem just right?

Visually Altering Proportions

Many ways exist to visually correct a poorly proportioned room. For example, painting a high ceiling in a color darker than the walls will make the ceiling appear lower. By continuing the dark color down at the tops of the walls, you can further reduce the visual height of the ceiling. Figure 28 shows two other examples of how you can make the proportions of a room seem to change. To make a wall at the end of a long, narrow room appear closer, you can paint it a bright color. As an alternative, place a mirror on one or both of the side walls to increase the room's visual width.



A bright wall makes a long, narrow room look shorter.

A wall with a mirror makes a narrow room look wider.

FIGURE 28—Proportions may be altered visually.

An inventive interior decorator can think of many other ways to alter the appearance of proportions without physically changing them. For example, suppose your client has a very large bedroom that she wants to appear cozier. The usual treatment in a bedroom is to place the bed with its headboard against a wall between two windows. But this usual treatment may not produce the desired effect. You might consider breaking up the room into areas—a bedroom with

a sitting room area, for example—with "walls" of room dividers or screens. This room provides an opportunity to use your creativity and ingenuity to change the proportions of a space that's too large by dividing it into parts. Always remember that no one piece of furniture must be kept in a traditional place. If you free yourself from standard ideas, you may come up with inspired solutions for rooms that have problems with proportions.

Scale

As you've already learned, scale is the relation of the size of one object to the size of another. In interior decorating, scale is the relation of the sizes of the objects in a room to each other and to the size of the room itself. Working with scale involves considering how the size of accessories relates to the size of the pieces with which they're used: a lamp on an end table, a box on a coffee table, a throw pillow on a sofa, and so on.

Choosing pieces that correspond in scale with each other and with the room creates a feeling of unity and harmony in that room. When the scale is appropriate, the eye should move smoothly from one object to another, taking in every important piece. If some pieces appear too large, they'll clash within the scale of the grouping. As a result, the viewer's attention may be directed toward these disproportionately large objects. The eye may be carried away abruptly from smaller objects, possibly missing some pieces that were intended to be noticed.

Grouping according to Scale

Furniture pieces intended to be grouped together should be selected according to scale. In other words, not only their size but also their visual weights should be compatible. Thus, how heavy or light an object appears to be is just as important as how large or small it actually is. For example, study the lamps in Figure 29. The lamps are about the same height, and they may weigh approximately the same. However, the lamp on the left, because it appears to be more massive

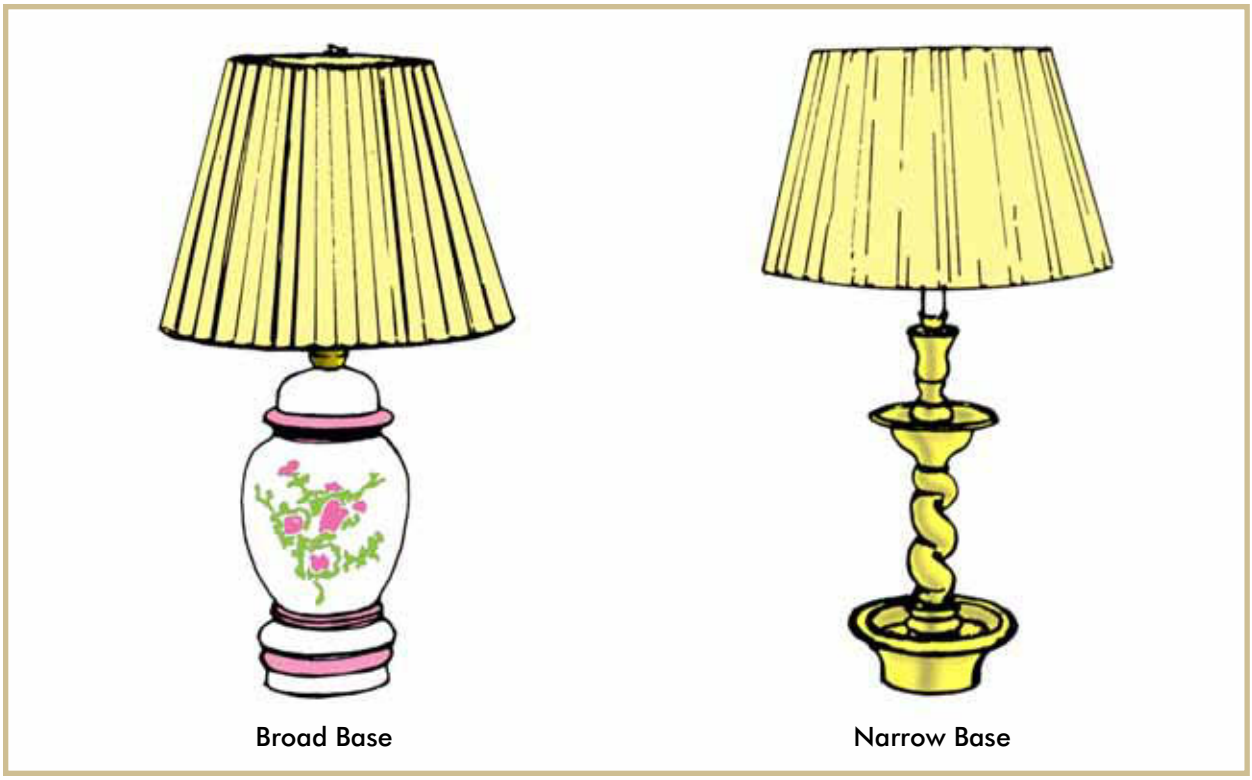


FIGURE 29—Even though these lamps are the same height, the broader lamp has more visual weight.

and bulkier than the other, has more visual weight. A broader object or one with a more massive base always appears to be larger and heavier.

As shown in Figure 30, color can also tilt the scales when comparing the visual weight of objects. That is, a dark-colored object appears heavier than a light-colored one.

Density also affects an object's visual weight. Two chairs, for example, may have similar dimensions, but one may appear light and airy, while the other appears heavy and bulky. Such is the case with the chairs pictured in Figure 31. The one on the left appears small and light because of its thin frame and webbed openings. The solid base, seat, and cushioning of the chair on the right make it appear to be much heavier.

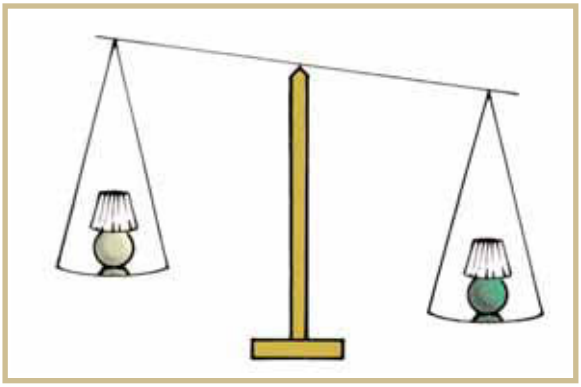


FIGURE 30—The two lamps in this illustration are exactly the same except for their color. Notice how the darker lamp appears to be heavier than the lighter one.

FIGURE 31—The visual weight of a piece is determined by more than size. Density is what makes a difference in the visual weight of these two chairs. (Photography courtesy of Drexel Heritage Furnishings)

You normally wouldn't group pieces that appear light and airy with those that appear bulky and heavy. Instead, you should choose pieces in terms of an appropriate scale for the whole grouping. Figure 32 shows an example of furnishings grouped together with an eye toward scale. Various groupings throughout a room should also correspond with each other in scale to create a feeling of harmony and unity among the groups.

Sometimes decorators deliberately offend the propriety of scale. Instead, they use their knowledge of scale to create a special effect. Perhaps a note of drama is needed to pick up a dull room. One surefire way of achieving drama is to include a piece that's oversized in comparison to the other objects in the room. For example, an overscaled (relatively large) pottery lamp can add a dramatic touch to a room. However, you should be cautious in breaking away from the principle of scale. First develop an eye for proper scale before attempting any special effects. As with the other principles of design, you must first master how to apply the principle before deliberately applying distortions.

FIGURE 32—These dining room furnishings are of an appropriate scale for both the size of the room and the other furnishings in it. (Photography courtesy of Drexel Heritage Furnishings)

Evaluating Scale

To become a skilled interior decorator, you must develop the ability to evaluate scale. Figure 33 shows some examples of improper and proper scale in two different groupings. In Figure 33A, notice how the lamp appears too large for the table. The lamp shade is actually wider than the surface of the table. In Figure 33B, the problem with scale has been corrected. The lamp in Figure 33C appears too tall for the table on which it's sitting. In addition, the table appears too small when compared with the size and visual weight of the chairs. These problems with scale are corrected in Figure 33D. The lamp is much better suited to the size of the table, and the table is better suited to the chairs.

In the next section, you'll examine two additional principles of design: emphasis and unity. Before proceeding, please complete the following Practice Exercise and *Self-Check 3*.

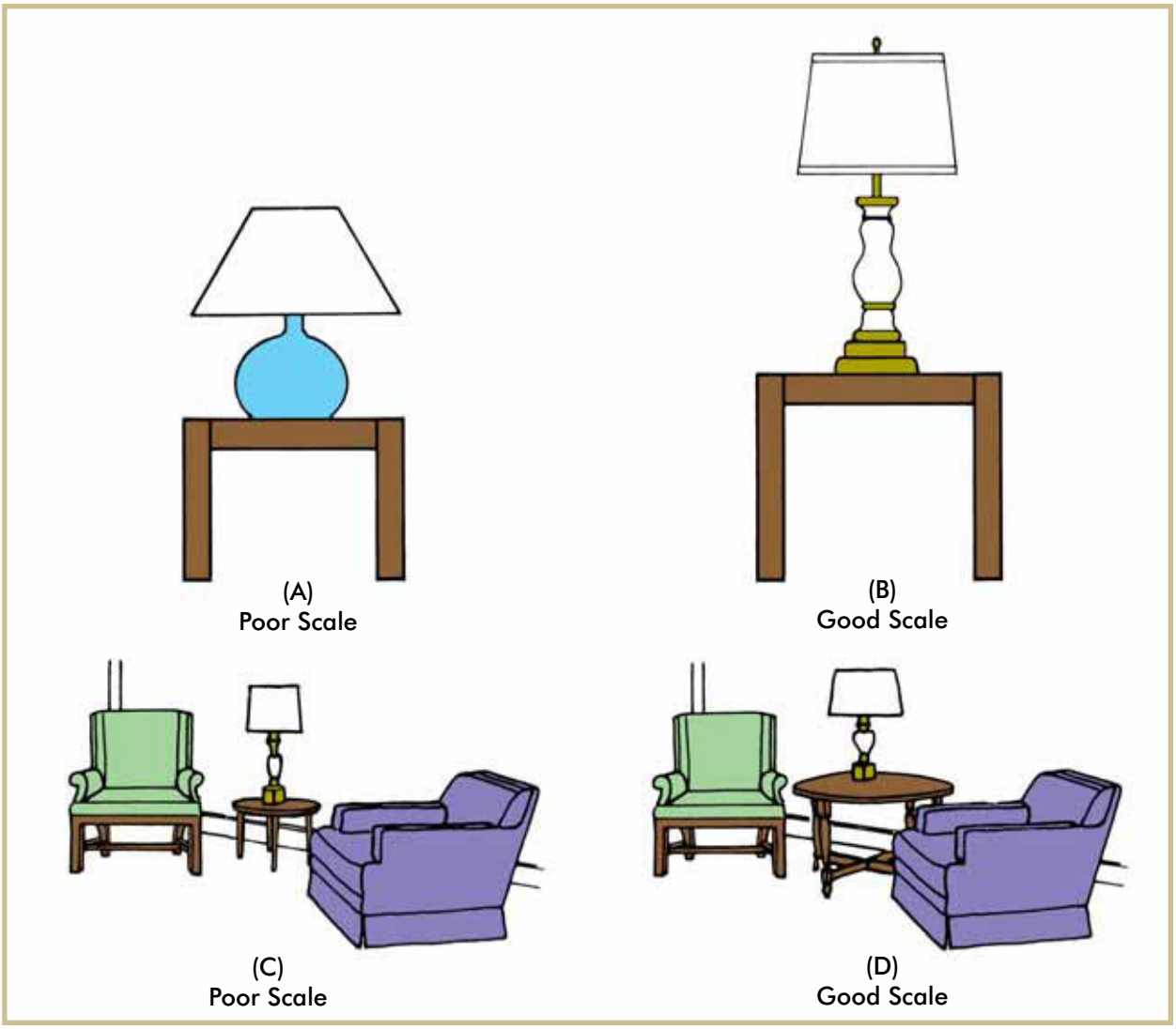


FIGURE 33—Scale is a critical design issue when you're choosing groups of furnishings.

Practice Exercise

Try the following project to develop your sense of scale. Start with a horizontal surface: the top of an end table, a coffee table, a mantel, or a chest of drawers. Remove everything from that surface. Collect a group of items in a variety of sizes. They may be bottles, jars, vases, boxes, candlesticks, and so on. For the time being, disregard colors and textures.

Choose one item and place it on the surface. Does it seem in a correct scale with that surface? Choose another item. Does its size look right when compared with the size of the surface and with the size of the first item? Evaluate each item as you

place it on the surface. Reject any items that seem too large or too small. Arrange the objects in a pleasing composition, either formal or informal. You should finish with an arrangement that seems to be grouped in a correct scale with the surface and with each other.

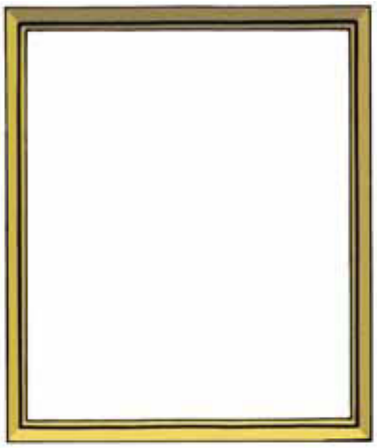
Practice this exercise with different groups of objects and on different surfaces. After doing it several times, you'll begin developing confidence in your ability to evaluate scale and compose appropriate arrangements.

Note: There's no answer supplied for this exercise.

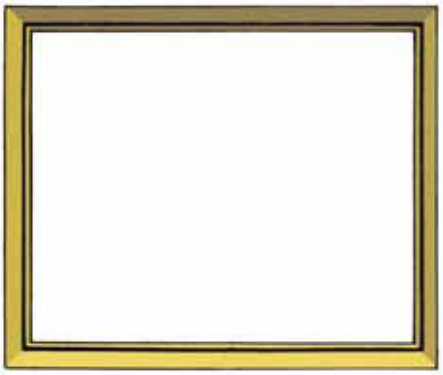
Self-Check 3

1. Which one of the following frames has the *best* proportions for displaying this sketch of a potted plant? Trace the sketch, and lay your tracing over each frame to determine which one is best.

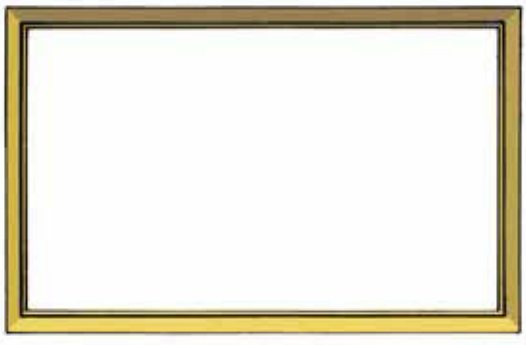
a.



c.



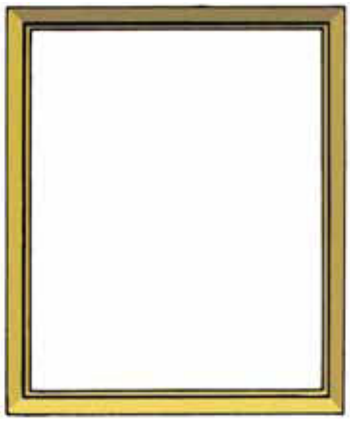
b.



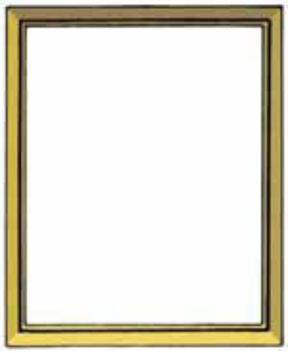
(Continued)

Self-Check 3

2. Which one of the following frames has the *best* proportions for displaying this sketch of a vase?

a. 

c.

b. 

(Continued)

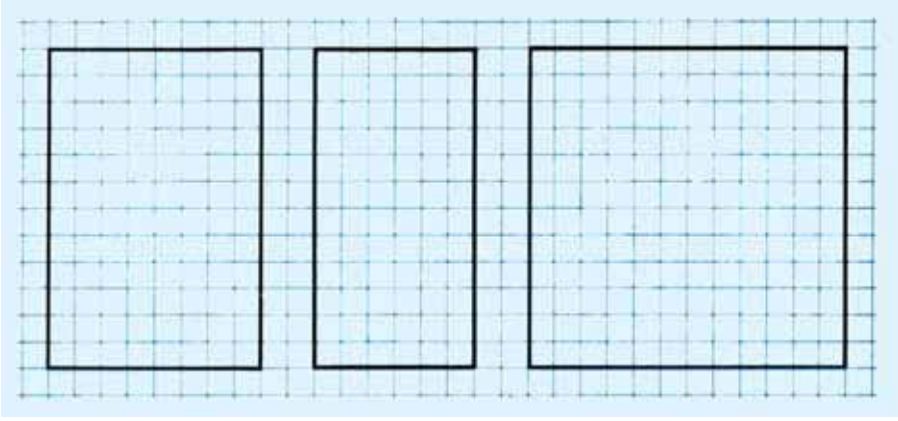
Self-Check 3

3. How would you evaluate the design of this ginger jar lamp? Examine the shape of the lamp and the shade, the proportions, and the surface design.

_____

_____

4. Which one of the following rectangles has the golden mean proportions of 2 to 3?



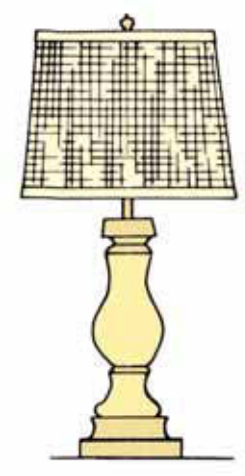
a. b. c.

_____

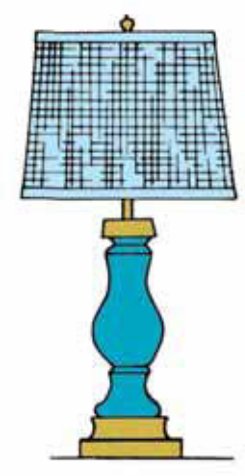
(Continued)

Self-Check 3

5. Which one of these two lamps seems to have more weight?

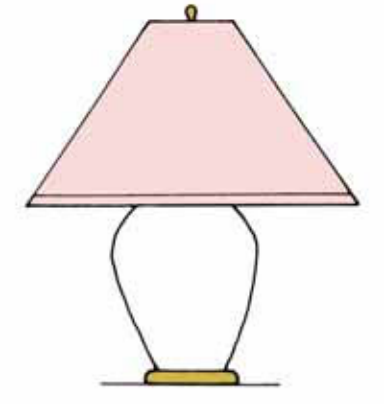


a.

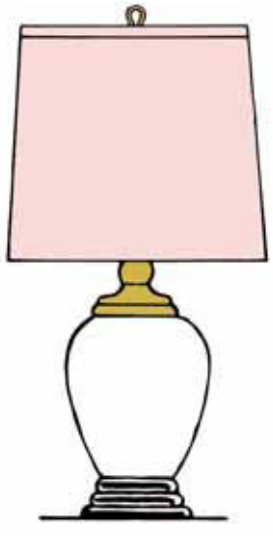


b.

6. Which one of these similar ginger jar lamps seems to have better proportions?



a.



b.

Check your answers with those on page 75.

THE PRINCIPLES OF EMPHASIS AND UNITY

Emphasis: Developing a Focal Point

A photograph or a painting usually has a *point of emphasis*, or *focal point*, that draws or attracts the eye. The development of a focal point is a natural response to the way the human eye works. When you look at an object, that object comes into sharp focus. Any surrounding objects—that is, areas around your focal point—appear a bit blurred. The objects surrounding your focal point are in your peripheral field of vision. Try focusing on an object a few feet away from you right now. Look directly at the object. Then, without moving your eyes from that object, note the areas and objects in your peripheral field of vision. If you don't redirect your gaze, the objects in the periphery won't be as clear as the object at your focal point.

People's brains become very accustomed to the way in which their eyes focus, but seldom are they consciously aware of it. Unconsciously and automatically, people search for a focal point whenever they look at something. If a focal point isn't apparent, their eyes settle on any point at random, or they wander restlessly from place to place, looking for a central point.

An interior decorator can satisfy this natural desire for a focal point by deliberately creating one in a room. That focal point provides the needed emphasis that will hold the entire design together. For example, look at Figure 34. Note how the deer in the foreground is established as the main emphasis of the photograph. The deer in the background and the grass in the distance are perceived as less important because they're farther away and they're somewhat out of focus. Because the eye can't focus on several locations at once, interior decorators should provide a focal point in every room.

FIGURE 34—A focal point minimizes the background. In this illustration, notice how your eyes are drawn to the deer in the front, while the grass and the deer in the background seem indistinct.

Emphasizing an Inherent Focal Point

When you examine a room as an interior decorator, you may find that you won't have to provide a focal point; one may already be present in that room. For example, the room may have a prominent fireplace or a beautiful view from a large picture window. Figure 35 shows two examples of focal points that may be inherent (already present) in a room.

FIGURE 35—A fireplace and a large picture window are good examples of inherent focal points.

If necessary, you can emphasize such inherent focal points to make them even stronger. For example, you can hang a beautifully framed painting over the fireplace, or arrange a sofa and chairs so that the people using them can enjoy the view from the picture window. Study Figure 36 to see how these arrangements might work.

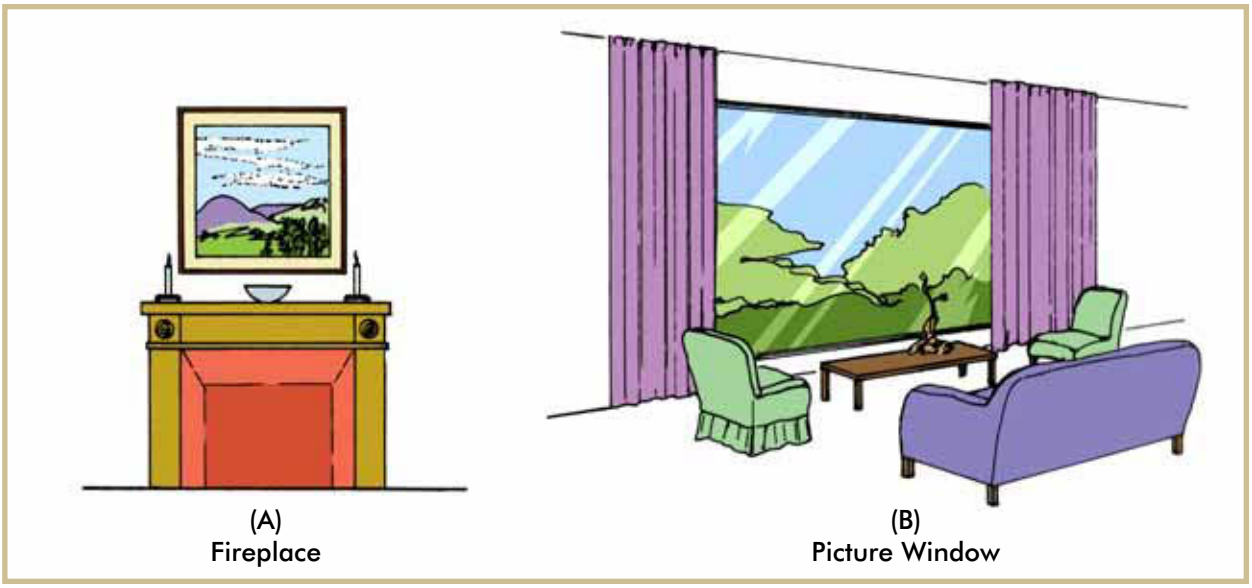


FIGURE 36—In view A, note how the fireplace is strengthened as a focal point by the addition of the painting hung above it and the formally balanced accessories arranged across its mantel. In view B, the emphasis on the view from the window is strengthened by the strategic placement of the furniture grouping.

If you rely on a picture window as a focal point, bear in mind that nightfall may weaken it. If the view is of the countryside rather than of a city skyline, the focal point will probably dissolve at night. In such a case, establish in the room another focal point that will provide a secondary point of emphasis in the daytime. This same point will then become the main focal point at night or when the draperies are drawn over the window.

Establishing a Focal Point

If a room has no readily apparent focal point, you can establish one. Concentrate, for example, on a particular wall, such as the sofa wall. You can build interest around the sofa and let that item become the focal point for the room. A group of paintings, an interesting wall hanging, or a bright print on the sofa will call attention to this focal point.

Figure 37 shows an example of how an interior decorator can establish a focal point in a room that seems to lack one. When you glance at the floor plan for this room in view A, no single area seems to be emphasized as the focal point. All of the furnishings appear to be parts of one large group arranged with informal balance. However, consider the lowboy on the south wall. As shown in the elevation plan in view B, this item could be developed as a focal point by adding above it a unique wall hanging (such as a shadow box containing a collection of objects). A small stool placed on each side of the lowboy helps frame and establish the lowboy as the focal point. Note in the floor plan that this focal point can be seen from the hall entrance—something that you should strive for in selecting a focal point.

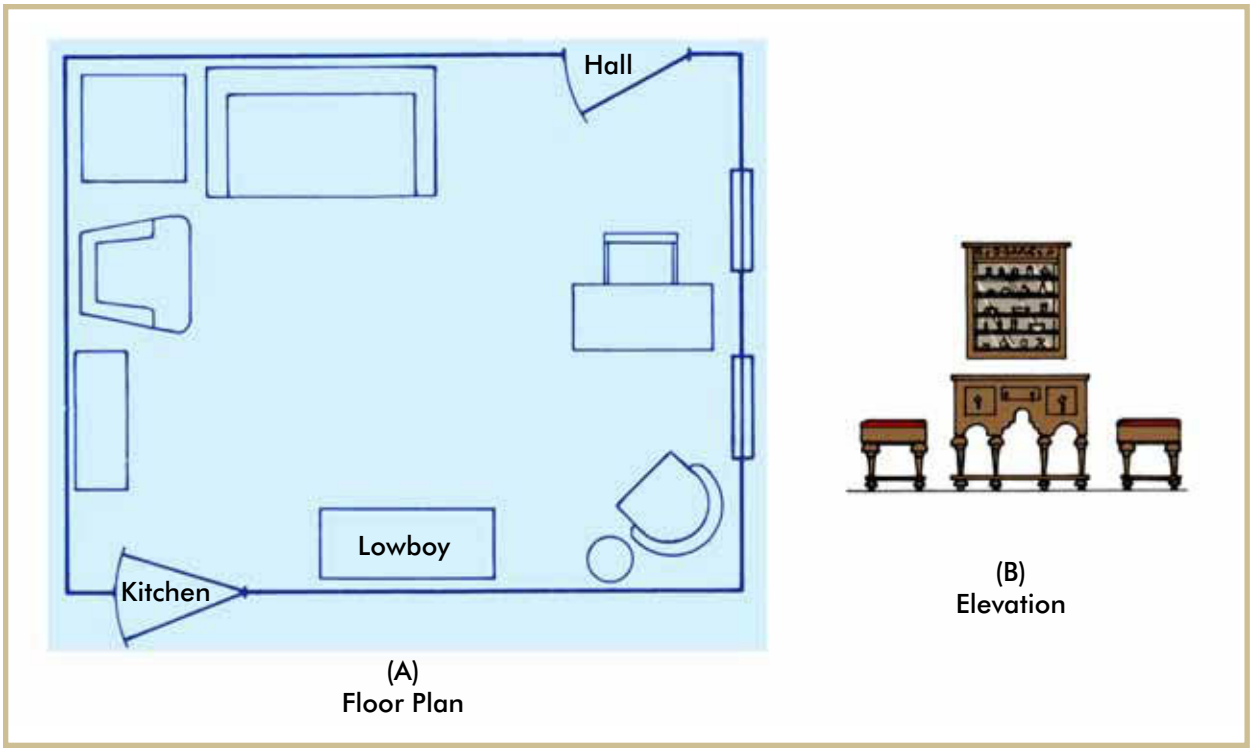


FIGURE 37—The focal point is the commanding feature that gives a room its character. Notice how the addition of two stools and a shadow box create a focal point around the lowboy.

Secondary focal points. A focal point should be so firmly established and emphasized that people notice it upon entering the room. If it's hidden behind the door by which guests enter, it won't be as effective. The character of the room should be immediately obvious to anyone who comes into

the room. Sometimes, however, there may be no location in the room that isn't hidden from the view of a person entering through some doorway. In such a case, consider establishing a secondary focal point that will draw the interest of the person entering the room. Then, your major focal point will be a surprise as the guest moves into and looks about the room.

Although it's usually better to have only one strong focal point in a room, a secondary focal point may sometimes be inherent. When you must consider two focal points in a room, one focal point should be made the dominant one. Perhaps the room has a fireplace, which is one focal point. A distinctive storage wall may also be in the room, competing with the fireplace for attention. The fireplace could be strengthened as the dominant focal point by adding a mirror, some interesting items on the mantel, and a furniture grouping around it. The storage wall would then become the room's secondary focal point.

When a room has two focal points, they should be united in some way. The two focal points should share a common element. For example, in an L-shaped room, one focal point may be in the dining area and the other in the living or conversation area. The focal point in the dining area may be a china cabinet or a cupboard displaying a collection of porcelain, or it may be the dining table itself with a beautiful centerpiece on top and a crystal chandelier overhead. The focal point in the living area may be a sofa grouping complete with a large painting hung over the sofa. To unite the two focal points, you may paint all of the walls the same color. Another way you may provide unity is by using the same color in an area rug located near each focal point.

Collections. As an interior decorator, you can apply the principle of emphasis and focal points not only with rooms, but also with such things as collections within a room. For example, your client may have a collection of glass pitchers. Is one pitcher stronger in color, pattern, or texture than the others? Is one pitcher much larger in scale than the others? Use that pitcher as the focal point of the collection, and arrange the other pitchers around that focal point. The more distinctive pitcher will be the first one seen and enjoyed by the observers. Then, as their gaze wanders leisurely to the

other pitchers in the collection, the observer can delight in viewing each one. Of course, you should also suggest an appropriate setting—a lighted glass cabinet or other such shelving—to display the client's prized collection.

Developing a Focal Point through Contrast

So far, you've learned how to establish and develop a focal point through the arrangement of furniture and accessories. Another way to develop a focal point is through the application of *contrast*—that is, by highlighting the difference or degree of difference between things so that one stands out. For example, certain aspects of a focal point may be designed to contrast with other aspects of a room. That contrast may be in size, shape, color, pattern, texture, or style.

Contrasts of sizes and shapes. As mentioned previously, an area can have emphasis because of the presence of an object that's larger than the surrounding objects. The object shouldn't be so large that it's overwhelming, but it should be large enough that the contrast attracts the eye strongly.

A piece of furniture that has lines or form contrasting with other pieces in the room can also serve as a focal point. For example, in a room where all of the pieces share horizontal lines, a vertical piece will be noticeably different and thus form a focal point. If all of the pieces are curved, a piece with straight lines can show contrast. Of course, the pieces should be of the same visual weight so that they'll be compatible. For example, you wouldn't put a very rustic piece of furniture in a room that's mostly fancy Victorian. That's not contrast; it's just plain incompatibility.

Contrasts of colors and patterns. One of the most effective (and least expensive) ways to create contrasts is through the use of color. For example, in a room with a color scheme of different shades of green, you might furnish some contrast with a painting of yellow flowers with green leaves. The yellow would create contrast and a focal point, while the green would relate the painting to the rest of the room.

A focal point can also be created when a patterned area is placed among nonpatterned areas or when one pattern is contrasted with a less dominant pattern. The eye is naturally drawn to the patterned area or to the dominant pattern. Suppose three walls of a room are painted antique white, and the fourth wall is covered with patterned wallpaper in red, black, and antique white. The eye will be naturally drawn to the bright patterned wall, which becomes the focal point. As another example, a sofa covered with a gold, white, and orange print would contrast with chairs covered in plain gold or in a second subordinate print.

Contrasts of textures and styles. Just as a contrast of pattern provides a focal point, so does a contrast of texture. A wall covered with textured wallpaper stands out from the other walls covered with flat paint. The rough tweed look of a sofa would contrast with smooth leather chairs and glass-and-metal tables. Of course, to strengthen the position of the tweed sofa as a focal point, you may need to emphasize it. An arrangement on the wall behind the sofa, interesting lamps on the end tables, or bright throw pillows could all help firmly establish the sofa as the room's focal point.

One of the most effective ways to establish furniture as a focal point in a room is through a contrast of furniture styles. Consider a bedroom with contemporary, or modern, furniture—a bed, a pair of nightstands, and a chair. Imagine that all of these pieces have simple lines and promote an informal feeling. Now, imagine adding to that room a Pennsylvania Dutch painted chest. What a contrast it would be, with its stylized decorations of flowers and birds in bright yellow, red, green, and blue. To balance and unite the chest to the room, you might need to add a bit of color or pattern elsewhere—for example, a colorful patchwork spread or printed draperies.

You must be careful when you combine furniture styles, however. Remember that there's a world of difference between contrast and incompatibility. Learning to use this sort of contrast effectively is the mark of a fine decorator. Your first experiences with it should be approached carefully. When you find a piece that you feel provides proper contrast, always ask yourself what it has in common with the other pieces or what can be done to make it compatible.

Options and Alternatives for Developing Emphasis

The basics of developing focal points. You may notice that many focal points have a strong vertical feeling. The natural response to vertical lines gives added strength to the focal point. So, think in terms of vertical lines when you're establishing a focal point or when you need to strengthen an existing one.

The balance of a focal point arrangement doesn't need to be formal. However, a focal point with formal balance is much stronger than one with informal balance. The eye is naturally drawn to the center of the focal point in a formally balanced arrangement, making the point more distinctive. Informal balance can be used for a focal point if it's used carefully. The balance must be strong and clear so that the focal point will hold the room together. The objects in the arrangement shouldn't be so scattered that the focal point becomes diffused.

Although each room should have only one major focal point, there should be something of interest in each seating area, against each wall, and in each part of the room. The occupants of a room don't always see a room from the same angle. The occupants live in the room and move from one area to another. Unlike a photograph in a decorating magazine, a room is viewed from many angles. Therefore, the room should be interesting and balanced, and the decorator should consider all angles.

Other priorities. The concept of establishing a major focal point has been used by decorators for many decades. It's a middle-of-the-road approach that gives a new decorator a solid foundation on which to build designs. But, after paging through interior decorating magazines (especially some of the more sophisticated ones, like *Architectural Digest* and *House Beautiful*), you'll probably realize that there are other priorities in decorating a room. Not every interior decorator believes that a room needs a particular dominant focal point. Some of the more extreme approaches have resulted in such designs as the all-patterned and many-patterned room and the stark, no-color room of straight-lined modern furniture.

The many-patterned room contains pattern after pattern after pattern—the more shocking the combinations, the better. Often, such rooms have too many focal points, fatiguing the eye and boggling the mind. Although the many-patterned room is still around as a decorating concept, the patterns are better coordinated and are more subtly blended than they once were. Usually, one pattern is noticeably dominant.

The stark, no-color room of modern furniture has mellowed both in color and in lines to the point of becoming—in some cases—a romantic-looking room with soft colors and curved furniture lines. Such is the endurance of extreme styles.

Even with current, trendy styles of decorating, a focal point is still a priority in many cases. The emphasis, however, should be developed in a much more subtle manner than the strong, definite focal point used in the past with conventionally arranged traditional furniture. Instead, the focal point may involve nothing more than a contrast of textures, shape, or color—possibilities you've already studied.

Unity

Have you ever heard or seen something that seemed just right to you? Perhaps it was the performance of a song or an instrumental composition. All of the aspects of the performance—the performers, their costumes, the lighting, the musical composition, the instruments—seemed perfectly combined and in harmony with each other. In other words, the performance had unity. Or perhaps you've seen someone whose hair, clothing, shoes, and accessories seemed made for one another. They were all parts of a carefully designed and assembled composition.

The impression that different parts belong together is what the term *unity* refers to. But why is unity a quality that pleases people, a quality that they look for? The answer is that unity implies an orderly arrangement with no discord. Any instance of unity confirms hope for order in the world, and so it pleases people.

To establish unity in interior decorating, a decorator must ensure that all parts of a room's decor appear to belong together. The floor, walls, windows, fabrics, furniture, colors,

lighting, and accessories should all work together to achieve a unified whole. Even when working in a grouping of similar items, a decorator can help firmly establish unity. For example, look at the groups of wall hangings in Figure 38. To ensure that unity is perceived in such a grouping, the decorator should make certain that the spaces between the pieces are smaller than the sizes of the pieces.

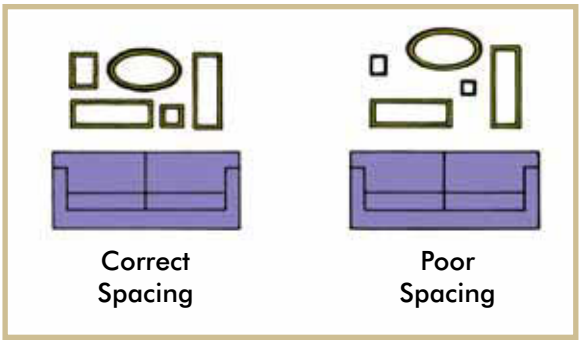


FIGURE 38—Properly spaced groupings of items create unity.

As you can probably appreciate by now, an interior decorator must juggle the elements and principles of design to achieve a unified room. At first, it's a conscious act. After some experience, though, a decorator applies those principles almost without thinking about them—just as a good juggler can cleverly perform a familiar routine. In the beginning, however, a decorator must consciously use his or her knowledge of balance, scale, and emphasis to achieve that seemingly effortless unity. A decorator is helped in the effort by a knowledge of harmony and rhythm, which are two aspects of unity.

Harmony

You're already familiar with the importance of using contrast in a room. Contrast can create a focal point, distribute interest throughout a room, and maintain balance. The contrasts, however, should never be so strong or so out of tune with the mood of the rest of the room that they cause discord. Nor should all elements in a room be so similar to each other that the room becomes monotonous. Somewhere between these two extremes of discord and monotony is that middle ground, which is *harmony*. Harmony is what gives a feeling of oneness, or unity, to a room. A room with harmony can still have some variety—but it will be desirable variety, rather than unnecessary confusion.

Achieving harmony. Harmony may be attained through a combination of design elements that have something in common. The common factor may be in terms of line, form, scale, texture, value, and so on. Thus, harmony can be created in many ways. Figure 39 shows some typical examples. The following paragraphs describe the different types of harmony illustrated in Figure 39.

FIGURE 39—Harmony can be achieved in a room through a variety of means, including line, form, scale, texture, and value.

- *Line harmony*. In Figure 39A, the curved lines of the window treatment are echoed in the curved lines of the back and arms of the love seat. In view B, the triangular table and the rectangular table are also harmonious in regard to line—both feature straight lines.
- *Form harmony*. Harmony of form can be established by combining identical shapes, such as those found in the nesting tables in Figure 39C.
- *Scale harmony*. The two chairs in Figure 39D are harmonious in size, or scale, even though the shapes of their backs are totally different.
- *Texture harmony*. The shapes of the lamps in Figure 39E are different, but their bodies have texture harmony.
- *Value harmony*. Similar color values are apparent in the differently shaped chairs pictured in Figure 39F.
- *Color harmony*. Imagine two colors, such as blue and blue-green, that are next to each other on a color wheel. Both colors contain some blue and thus have color harmony. As an example of color value harmony, imagine a medium blue and a medium green of the same intensity, or value. Since those tones are of the same value, they're harmonious. Harmony can thus be achieved by using varying amounts and values of colors in a room. As another example, consider a dark green rug and beige draperies. Harmony can be achieved in this room with the addition of medium-green trim to the draperies.

To achieve harmony in a room, you must develop and preserve one dominant theme: richness, simplicity, formality, informality, strength (boldness), delicacy, nostalgia, or ultra-modernity. That dominant theme may be enriched by a subtle, subordinate theme.

However, *enriching* doesn't mean that you would mix informal Early American furniture with a sophisticated art deco mirror in a room with formal period walls. Rather, you might use elements that have slightly different flavors, but still share some common trait. Figure 40 shows an example of a room with a unified design, even though it includes a slight mix of

styles. The sleek table and contemporary upholstered chairs exude an atmosphere of sophisticated modernity. That dominant mood is enhanced by a subtle subordinate theme coming from the sophisticated antique accessories on the side table. The common quality, or overall mood, is one of sophistication. A secondary, subtle note of tradition is added through the use of fringed throw pillows, which still harmonize with the sophisticated modern interior.

FIGURE 40—Although there's variation in the design in this room, the unity of mood is preserved. (Furniture manufactured by Hickory White Company, High Point, NC, 910-885-1200)

Adding contrast. Harmony should be a happy medium between dullness and confusion. But be imaginative. Don't always use the safe combination. One of the rewards of decorating is the opportunity it gives you to be creative.

Room interest is created by contrasts. Although contrast sounds like the opposite of unity, a good decorator actually makes these two concepts work together. Like a good cook who learns a recipe and then adds a different spice to achieve interesting results, the decorator "seasons" a room with contrasts.

Contrast can be achieved in many ways. As long as the basic principles of decorating are followed, unity will be preserved while contrast enlivens the design. Figure 41 shows some examples of how contrast could be blended into a room. Here's an explanation of these types of contrast:

- *Contrast of size.* The large breakfront cabinet centered in Figure 41A attracts attention because of its contrast in size to the chairs and pictures.
- *Contrast of line.* The vertical lines of the cabinet in Figure 41B contrast with the horizontal lines of the two chairs.

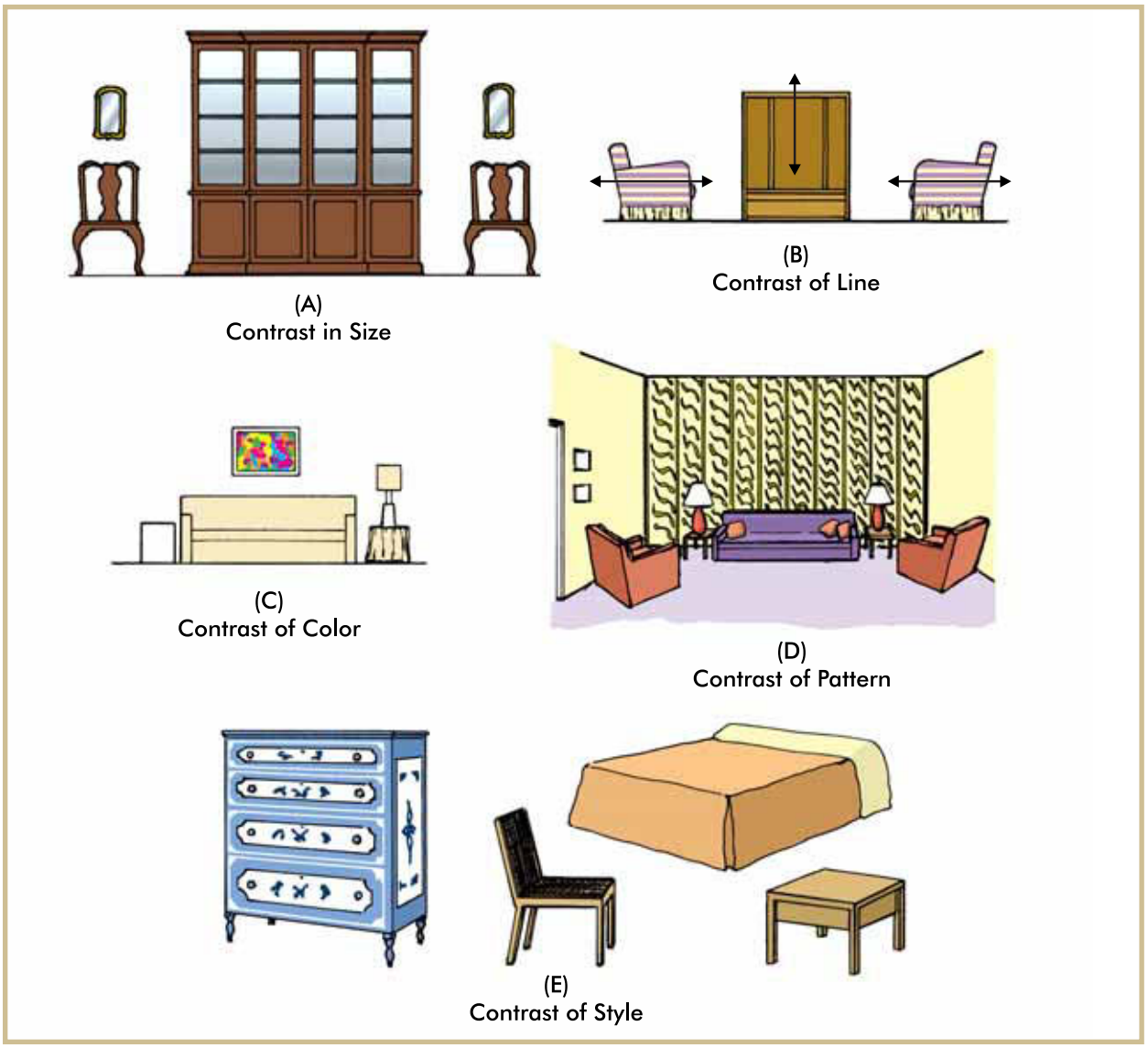


FIGURE 41—These examples illustrate how contrast can add interest to the decor of a room.

- *Contrast of color.* The colorful painting in the no-color scheme in Figure 41C provides needed contrast.
- *Contrast of pattern.* The eye is naturally drawn to the patterned wall featured in Figure 41D. Without this pattern, the room would have only solid colors.
- *Contrast of style.* In Figure 41E, the Pennsylvania Dutch chest adds a needed note of contrast to the plain modern pieces.

Figure 42 shows how contrast in texture and unity of line are blended together to create an eye-catching setting. Textural contrast is created between the smooth wood in the coffee table and the rougher-looking wood in the armoire behind the sofa. The silk curtains, the fabric in the side chair, and the fruit and flowers on the table introduce new textures as well. Meanwhile, the interesting repetition of the square pattern is echoed in almost precisely the same size in both the side chair and the armoire. This repetition helps to create a well-unified look.

FIGURE 42—Contrast and unity don't necessarily oppose each other in the art of interior decorating.

Rhythm

Rhythm refers to any movement that occurs in measured intervals. Rhythm is also an aspect of unity. In interior decorating, rhythm refers to the directed movement of the eye throughout a room. Rhythm is actually an extension of the concept of harmony. Harmony is achieved by combining elements with similar qualities. Rhythm is achieved by the repetition of elements with similar qualities. For example, you may attain rhythm in a room through the repetition of a line, a shape, a value, a color, a texture, a pattern, or a design motif.

Figure 43 shows some examples of how you can achieve rhythm. For example, a particular curved line may be used in tables, chairs, sofas, mirrors, fabric, and wallpaper. Figure 43A illustrates how you can accomplish rhythm through a line in a window, a bookcase, and a bed. All of the objects with this feature are then placed at strategic intervals in a room so that the eye moves from one curve to another, giving the room a definite rhythm. As shown in view B, rhythm from repeated shapes may also be deliberately

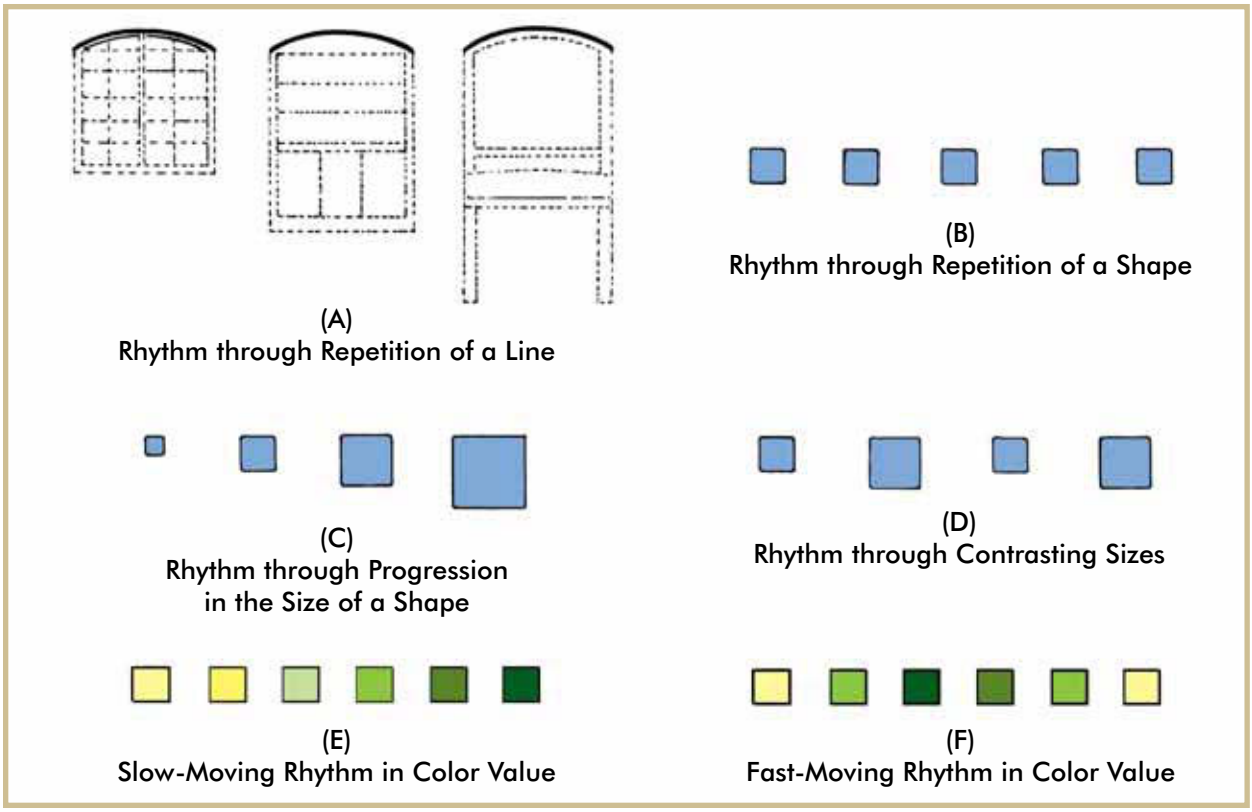


FIGURE 43—In interior decorating, rhythm can be accomplished in a variety of ways.

created. In a bedroom containing rectangular chairs, tables, and a bed, for example, the rectangular shape may be continued in a rectangular pattern printed on the bedspread and draperies. For contrast, a collection of rounded paperweights might be displayed in a rectangular shadow box.

As shown in Figure 43C and D, rhythm may also be created by a progression. A series of shapes, for example, may progress through increases or decreases in size. A series of values may change from light to dark gradually for a slow rhythm (E), or the values may change from light to dark quickly and repeatedly for a faster rhythm (F). The same is true with shifting the actual colors. For example, a room may have a slow color progression moving from yellow to yellow-green to green, or it may have a fast progression moving from yellow to green and back to yellow again.

Several rhythms may occur in one room at the same time. Be aware of each rhythm so that you can control them and make them work for you to create a unified whole.

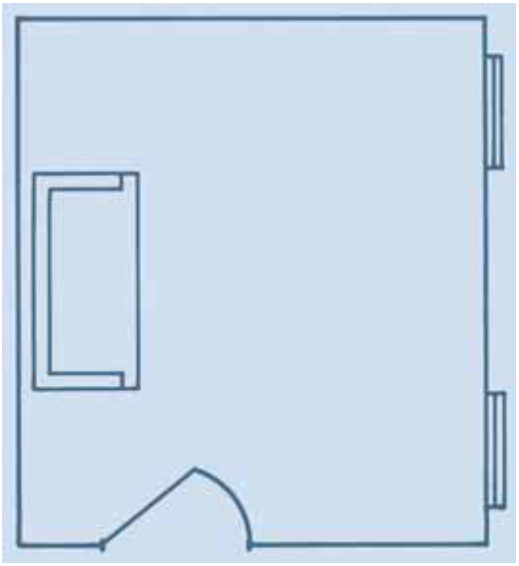
Just as a rhythm may be set up throughout a room, so it may be established in a collection or a grouping of wall hangings or accessories. For example, look at the room pictured in Figure 44. This room has rhythm. Very few elements are used, but notice how the parallel pattern of sets is repeated from the foreground to the doors leading outside. The pattern of the bowls on the counter is repeated in the place settings on the table and reiterated again in a more subtle way by the square panes in the windows. There's also a sense of rhythm between the rectangular panes of glass and the rectangular sections in the built-in cupboard at the right. Each element moves the eye along and makes the room come together.

FIGURE 44—Several types of rhythm can be used in one decor.

In the final section of this study unit, you'll consider how to evaluate designs. Before you begin to study that material, please complete *Self-Check 4*.

Self-Check 4

1. Refer to the floor plan shown below. Other than the walls, the room currently includes two windows, a door, and a sofa. To this room, add a bookcase and a storage unit containing a television and a sound system. The key is to establish a focal point before you add these two elements. Decide where the focal point should be and what needs to be done, if anything, to develop it.



In the spaces provided, indicate whether each of the following statements is True or False.

_____ 2. Sometimes, a room has a built-in focal point, such as a fireplace.

_____ 3. The term *focal point* refers to the eye moving in measured intervals.

_____ 4. Unity and contrast can exist in the same room.

Check your answers with those on page 77.

EVALUATING DECORATING PLANS

Developing the decorating plan for an interior involves applying each of the design principles. You should apply these principles to individual components—to furniture pieces, to colors, and to floor coverings—and you should also apply them when evaluating the finished results.

Use your growing knowledge of design principles to evaluate how well designed each component is before you choose it. The same principles that you use for evaluating a room can be used to evaluate a chair, a wallpaper design, a lamp, a vase, and the design of wallpaper. For example, when choosing a chair, determine whether the chair is well proportioned. Is the seat large enough? Is it too deep? Does it seem just right? Check to see that the legs are in an appropriate scale with the back and seat. Are the legs too heavy for the delicate back, or are they just right? Does the chair express unity? Are the legs and the fabric as delicate in feeling as the curved back? Is there a rhythm of line among the seat, the back, the legs, and the arms?

Use all of the design elements and principles you've studied to evaluate each piece you want to use. How would you use those design criteria to evaluate a wallpaper design or a lamp or a vase? Is the wallpaper design in proper scale with the room in which it will be used? Does the design have a pleasant rhythm? Does it have unity—that is, do all of the elements of the design seem to belong together? Is there a dominant element in the design, or is it an allover design? Which would be more appropriate for the room you're planning?

Decorating for Function

During your studies and later in your career, you must always be aware of the importance of function in a room's decor. *Function* refers to the ability of a room to meet a client's needs. Discussion of this concept was purposefully saved for last because function is your most significant consideration in decorating. No matter how beautiful a room is,

no matter how well you've applied all of the design elements and principles, the room isn't any good unless it serves the function for which it was meant.

Consider the Room

Although a room sometimes has multiple purposes, usually it has one overriding function. Don't lose sight of that major function as you develop your plan for the room's decor. Think of key words that relate to the major function of each room or area. The following list includes areas in a home, together with descriptions containing key words that may help you relate your decorating efforts to each area's functional requirements. Try to think of even more key words for these rooms and areas.

- *Entry*. An entrance should say "Welcome." It should give a preview of home while being practical. An entry is a place of preparation for going in and out.
- *Dining room*. The dining area should complement a healthy appetite. The setting should be relaxing and should establish a conversational mood.
- *Living room*. The living room should be comfortable, livable, and attractive.
- *Bedroom*. The bedroom may be a private and personal retreat. It may also be designed to provide a relaxing setting or efficient storage.
- *Children's bedroom*. The bedroom for a child should be sturdy, safe, and comfortable.
- *Guest room*. A room set aside for guests should be hospitable and comfortable. However, often this room serves another purpose when the family has no guests. Keep this in mind as you plan the decor of a guest room.
- *Kitchen*. The terms *well-organized*, *easy-to-clean*, and *bright* are aspects often associated with successfully planned kitchens.
- *Bathroom*. A functional bathroom should be a well-planned space that's easy to clean.
- *Patio*. A patio may involve entertainment, relaxation, and a garden look.

Consider the Client

Before creating a decorating plan, ask your client to give serious thought to the function of the room you're working on. Sometimes, the major function of a room won't be what interests a client the most. For example, a client who wants a fussy, extravagant bathroom might be more concerned with how it looks than with how easy it is to clean. As the decorator, you'll need to fulfill the client's wishes. However, you should choose materials that fulfill the appearance requirements while still being as easy to clean as possible.

Clients with such special requirements are the exception, not the rule. However, you must be sure that you discover exactly what each client wants. Such knowledge gives you a framework in which to make the decor as functional as possible.

Design Tip

One aspect of design is to make a room livable in a beautiful way. Most people's lives are filled with a lot of necessary clutter. If a room is designed without taking the natural ebb and flow of this clutter into account, even the most exquisite room can be quickly buried beneath the debris of everyday life.

The top of the bedroom dresser is a case in point. This space is one of the handiest, most logical places for pocket change, earrings, watches, buttons that come off, ticket stubs, keys, and any of 1,000 pieces of movable clutter we shift around in our lives. Left to its own devices, this clutter will pile up and grow, as if it had a mind of its own. Soon the gorgeous lacquered dresser top you went to pains to find for your client is invisible.

The solution is to incorporate cases, boxes, trays, and so on into the design. Whether they're eloquent antique boxes or woven Tibetan hemp boxes, they're a substantial improvement over piles of clutter. Find out what your client is most likely to accumulate and provide boxes and trays accordingly.

Consider the Furnishings

The more *versatile* a piece of furniture is, the better it will function. Have you ever wondered why so many sofas are completely upholstered with no exposed wood frame or metal showing? That's to make the piece more versatile. The feeling of such a sofa can be changed simply by changing the fabric covering, whereas exposed wood or chrome would limit the potential for change.

Suppose a young married couple wants a contemporary setting. The completely upholstered sofa can be covered in a contemporary nubby tweed. A set of chrome chairs can be positioned to flank the sofa. Some years later, the same couple may fall in love with Regency furniture. They can have the sofa reupholstered in an appropriate fabric and add to the setting some Regency pieces, such as a pair of chairs covered in striped satin, a table, and so on.

Along with versatility, durability must be considered as an aspect of function. The sturdiest possible furnishings, fabrics, and other materials should be selected for each decor.

Just because a piece of furniture is functional doesn't preclude it from also being beautiful. The two—function and beauty—can and should go hand in hand. But function comes first. Then you, as the creative decorator, can add beauty to the function.

For example, what if a client would love to use deep pink velvet in the living room, but this client has two active preschool children? You could use the velvet for throw pillows on the sofa. On the reverse side of the pillows, use the same sturdy print that's used for the draperies. You could also have an extra pair of pillows made in case of accidents. Use the deep pink velvet for tiebacks on the draperies. As a final touch, you can use a velvet circular tablecloth (reserved for company use) for a round table by the sofa. You've solved the dilemma by being practical while providing some pink velvet touches. As a further example of joining function with beauty, assume that the same client would love a light-colored rug but can't even consider placing it in the living room because of the active children. Suggest putting light rugs in the master bedroom where they won't get as much wear.

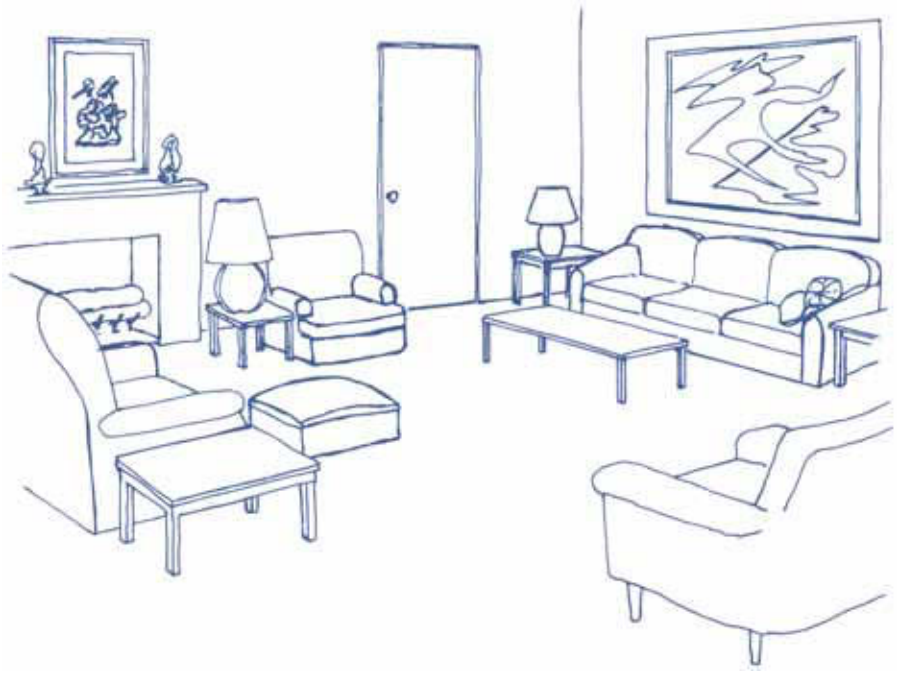
Examining a Finished Room

As an interior decorator, you need to be an effective decorating critic. You must be able to look at rooms you've decorated yourself and rooms decorated by others with a professional eye. First, of course, you'll have an emotional reaction. Either you'll like what you see and feel drawn to it, or you won't. Then, however, you must begin analyzing the room critically, measuring it against the elements and principles of design. It's professional evaluation of a room that will quickly reveal why it succeeds or how it can be improved. A thorough understanding and use of the elements and principles of design is what ultimately makes you a professional decorator—not a person who creates a beautiful interior by happy accident, but one who can consistently create different types of beautiful interiors.

Congratulations! You've reached the end of this study unit. Take time to complete *Self-Check 5*. Then review the material in this unit in preparation for the examination.

Self-Check 5

1. Make a rough sketch or draw a floor plan showing what you would do to correct the problem in this room arrangement. What's wrong with the room? Is the furniture arrangement functional? What can you do to correct the thing or things that are wrong?



In the spaces provided, indicate whether each of the following statements is True or False.

_____ 2. A room can have only one function.

_____ 3. When evaluating furnishings, you should always consider durability.

_____ 4. Normally, a prime consideration in designing a kitchen should be to make the space more private and personal.

Check your answers with those on page 78.

PRACTICE EXERCISE ANSWERS

Exercise 1

The illustration below shows two suggested decorating solutions. Both remove the horizontal lines that make the arrangement monotonous. In the first illustration, the small cabinet has been removed to break the monotony. In the second illustration, a much taller piece has been substituted for the small cabinet and mirror. This addition creates a good line balance in the setting. Study these illustrations carefully and compare them to the original drawing in the Practice Exercise. Compare your sketch with those shown here. Does your sketch improve the arrangement? Have you eliminated the horizontal problem?

Exercise 2

Below is a photograph of the room described in Exercise 2. How well were you able to visualize the room?

(Photography courtesy of Drexel Heritage Furnishings)

SELF-CHECK ANSWERS

Self-Check 1

1. False
2. False
3. True

Self-Check 2

1. heavy
2. radial
3. formal
4. informal
5. three

Self-Check 3

1. a.

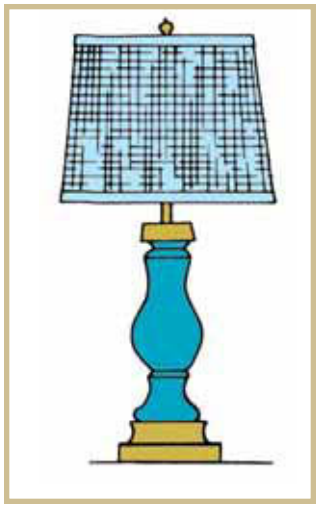
ANSWERS

2. b

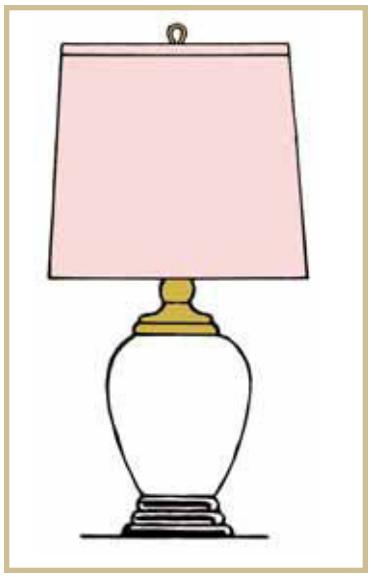
3. The lamp has no major design flaws. The size of the shade appears in proportion with the body of the lamp, making the overall shape well proportioned. The design on the lamp blends in well with the lamp's curved surface.

4. a

5. Although the two lamps are almost identical, the dark color of the lamp in b makes it appear heavier.

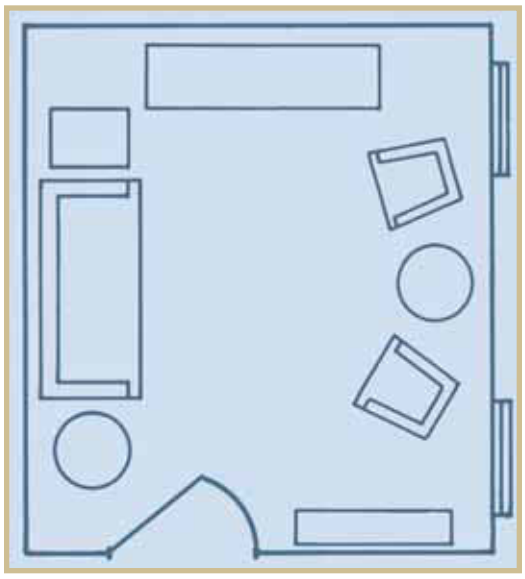


6. b



Self-Check 4

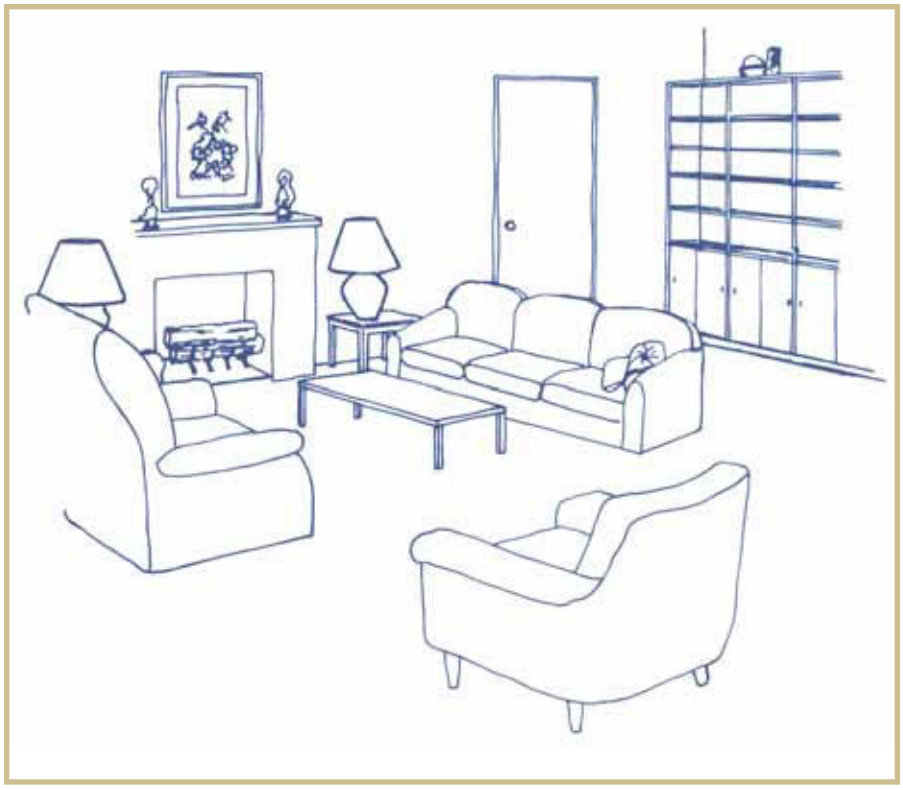
1. The doorway near the sofa prevents the development of a complete grouping there. One possible solution is to develop a grouping between the windows as the focal point. This formal grouping consists of a round table with an armchair on each side. A rounded mirror can be hung above the table to strengthen the grouping as the focal point. The storage wall and bookcase have been placed with consideration to convenience in viewing the television.



2. True
3. False
4. True

Self-Check 5

1. Traffic coming through the door is blocked by the coffee table. The sofa and table can be moved to form a grouping around the fireplace. This change frees the traffic lane and compresses the large conversation area. It also leaves room for a storage wall on the right. In addition, the painting over the sofa was too large for the sofa, as was the lamp on the table by the fireplace. The lamp by the door was scaled too small for its table and for the grouping. These poorly scaled items have been replaced in this sketch.



2. False
3. True
4. False

The Elements and Principles of Design

EXAMINATION NUMBER

01202300

Whichever method you use in submitting your exam answers to the school, you must use the number above.

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Questions 1–20: Select the one best answer to each question.

1. Which one of the following factors is one of the principles of design?

   A. Form
   B. Color
   C. Pattern
   D. Balance

2. Of the following expressions, which *best* describes the concept of harmony in a room's decor?

   A. A consistency of mood
   B. Strongly contrasting color values
   C. A mix of assorted furniture styles
   D. An assortment of items in various sizes

3. Normally, a prime consideration in designing a child's bedroom would be to ensure that the

   A. mood is conversational.
   B. furnishings are sturdy.
   C. colors provide contrast.
   D. room has a secondary focal point.

Examination

4. Which one of these statements is *correct* regarding how pattern is used in design?

   A. Only the largest, most dominant pattern affects the overall appearance of the room.
   B. A large pattern appears most dramatic when used in a large room or on an oversized object.
   C. The secondary print used in a room's decor should be as strong as the primary print.
   D. Decorative patterns should be selected to harmonize with structural patterns.

5. Which one of these statements *best* describes the concept of line as it's used in design?

   A. A line is a straight shape that's much narrower than it is long.
   B. The use of lines in a design always creates a sense of restfulness and stability.
   C. A line leads the eye, conveying a sense of motion.
   D. The use of lines in a design will always create a sense of strength and dignity.

6. Which one of these statements is *correct* regarding the design concepts of proportion and scale?

   A. The terms *proportion* and *scale* are interchangeable terms.
   B. Proportion has to do with the sizes of the parts of an object; scale refers to the size of an object in relation to the size of other objects.
   C. An object's proportions refer to its size in relation to the size of other objects; scale refers to the object's measured dimensions.
   D. Proportion refers to the dimensions of objects that are parts of a single group; scale refers to the dimensions of furniture groups that are parts of a single room.

7. Which one of the following expresses a color value?

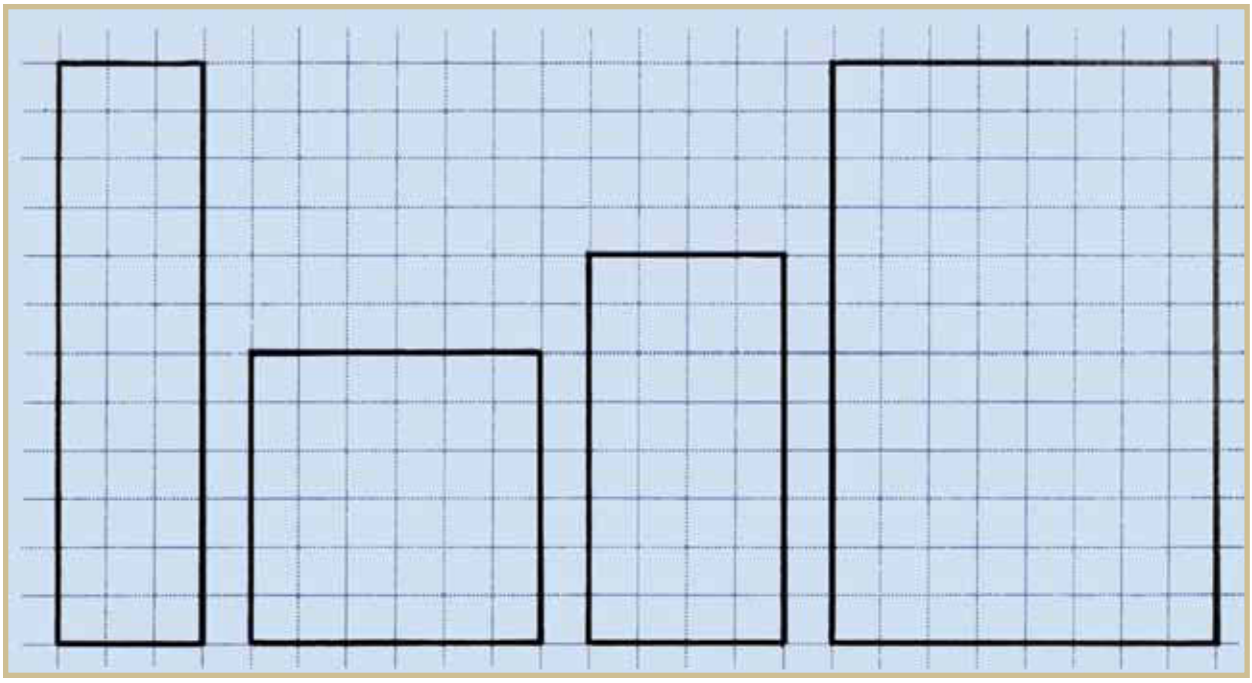
   A. True green
   B. Dark green
   C. Blue-green
   D. Forest green

8. The bodies of the lamps shown in Examination Figure 1 have harmony of

   A. scale.
   B. line.
   C. texture.
   D. value.

EXAMINATION FIGURE 1

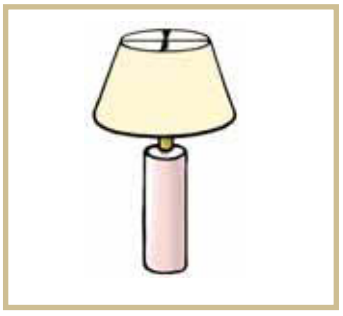
9. Which one of the rectangles shown here has the golden mean proportions?



A. **B.** **C.** **D.**

10. The basic shape of the lamp shade in Examination Figure 2 is a

A. cone.
B. cylinder.
C. sphere.
D. pyramid.

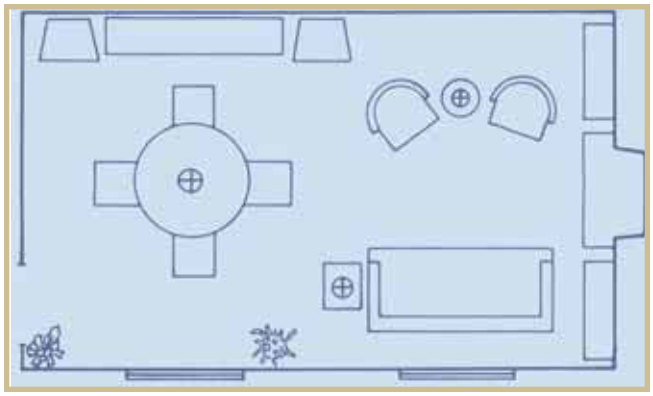


EXAMINATION FIGURE 2

11. Which one of the following statements is *correct* regarding the design concept of scale?

A. The scale of the objects in a room can be varied for a special effect.
B. A room can't have unity unless the scale of all objects in the room is the same.
C. When objects are arranged on each side of a centerline for formal balance, good scale will result.
D. If an object possesses good proportions, good scale in the arrangement is guaranteed.

12. The room in Examination Figure 3 has two focal points. One is at the fireplace wall, and the other is in the dining area. As a decorator, you decide to use paint to unite these two focal points. How would you paint the walls in the dining area?



EXAMINATION FIGURE 3

A. In a lighter value than that in the living area
B. In a different color than that in the living area
C. In white to reflect the living area
D. In a similar color to reduce contrasts

13. Which one of the following shows a good example of rhythm used in a room's decor?

A. An arched line at the tops of dining room chairs repeated in a sofa back, a mirror top, and a window's drapery line
B. A rectangular red area rug, oval-backed dining chairs, and a blue dining table
C. A dark-blue print pillow on a white sofa and a light-green, solid-colored pillow on a wooden chair
D. An oval coffee table in front of an L-shaped sofa

14. Which one of these statements *best* describes the concept of form as it's used in design?

A. A form is a series of lines enclosing a space.
B. A form is any series of three-dimensional shapes arranged in a group.
C. The concept of form refers to art objects, while shape refers to furniture.
D. An object's form is either inherent or derived.

15. Generally, the *most* effective way to use texture when decorating a room is by

A. selecting one texture only for use throughout the room.
B. combining only similar textures throughout the room.
C. using only smooth textures.
D. combining different textures in ways that provide contrast and balance.

16. Which one of the following is an element of design?

A. Form
B. Unity
C. Scale
D. Proportion

17. Which of the following statements is *correct* regarding the design concept of emphasis?

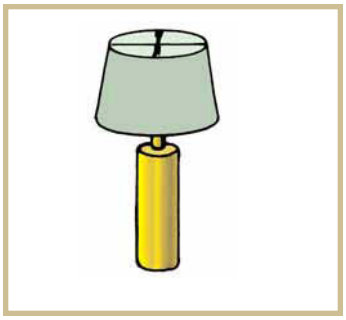
A. A room should not have more than one focal point.
B. Focal points in a room's architecture must be emphasized with contrasting colors.
C. A focal point can't be established in a setting where formal balance is used.
D. Generally, a focal point should be visible from the entrance to a room.

18. Which one of the following should be your primary concern when creating an arrangement with informal balance?

A. Arrange furniture and other objects so that you have no centerline.
B. Place those items with the greatest visual weight nearest the centerline.
C. Balance all the items around a central pivot point.
D. Make certain that no two identical objects are placed on opposite sides of the centerline.

19. The basic shape of the body of the lamp in Examination Figure 4 is a

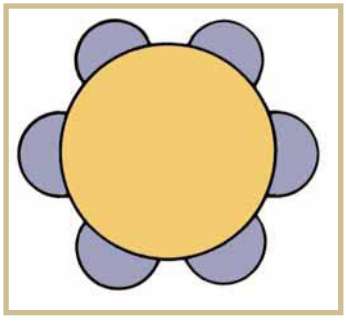
A. cone.
B. cylinder.
C. sphere.
D. pyramid.



EXAMINATION FIGURE 4

20. Which type of balance is represented in the overhead view of a table and chairs in Examination Figure 5?

A. Formal
B. Informal
C. Radial
D. Combined



EXAMINATION FIGURE 5